

CONSTRUCTIONS OF LIAO (907-1125) DYNASTIC IDENTITIES  
IN EASTERN EURASIAN CONTEXT, 900-1100

BY

CHEN XUE

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## Abstract

This thesis questions the effectiveness of “ethnicity” as a prevailing analytical framework in research on medieval Eastern Eurasian history, by the means of a study of the dynastic identities of the Liao 遼 state (907-1125). “Dynastic identities” is primarily used to refer to three aspects: the imperial designations of Liao monarchs, the constructed origins of the Liao imperial and consort clans, and the perceived spatial location of the Liao state in the cosmos. The thesis rethinks assumptions of the Liao identity as either a “conquest dynasty” or a sinicised regime, and the oversimplistic yet deeply engrained ethnic binary of Han/Chinese and non-Han/Chinese behind these assumptions in many scholarly works on regimes with perceived non-Han/Chinese origins. I argue that this ethnic discourse is anachronistic and inappropriate with regard to many aspects of Liao history. Liao dynastic identities were primarily based on appropriating cultural elements with Sinic origins, which nevertheless were perceived by the Liao elite as universal and common legacies rather than those exclusively owned by Han/Chinese, and which they reconstructed in new ways to underscore the Liao preeminence in their contemporary world.

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The 25<sup>th</sup> August 2020, marked six years since I first landed in the UK. I still remember the excitement, anxiety, and curiosity in my heart when I arrived in this country alone and far from home. This first overseas flight of my life took me more than ten hours, with a transfer in Frankfurt, from the eastern edge of Eurasian continent to an island west from the shore of mainland Europe. I believed then and will never doubt that this was the best choice I have ever made – for the first time in my life I had been pursuing a personal goal and academic interest without being asked to fulfil anyone else's demands. I am now at the end of my PhD study. This has been a long academic journey, but for me this moment gives me confidence, joy, and an expectation for myself as a historian. This has been an amazing experience for which I will always feel grateful.

## Abbreviation

<i>CFYG</i>	<i>Cefu yuanguì</i> 冊府元龜
<i>LS</i>	<i>Liao shi</i> 遼史
<i>JLQJZ</i>	<i>Jinli qijiu zhuan</i> 錦里耆舊傳
<i>JWDS</i>	<i>Jiu Wudai shi xinji huizheng</i> 舊五代史新輯會證
<i>QDGZ</i>	<i>Qidan guo zhi</i> 契丹國志
<i>WS</i>	<i>Wei shu</i> 魏書

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## Chapter I Introduction

### 1. The Kitan people and the Liao Empire: an overview

With the decline in the central authority of the Tang 唐 Empire (618-907) since the late ninth century, especially after its final collapse in 907, multiple regional powers emerged from its former districts and frontier zones. The Liao regime,<sup>1</sup> founded by the Kitan elite and based on the northeastern frontier of Tang (roughly present-day eastern Inner Mongolia), gradually rose to become a dominant force in Eastern Eurasia over the next two centuries.

The name of “Kitan” first appeared in an official history – the *Wei shu* 魏書 – completed in 554 for the Northern Wei 北魏 dynasty (386-534). The *Qidan zhuan* 契丹傳 (Memoir of the Kitan) of *WS* records that during the Dengguo 登國 reign (386-396), Northern Wei troops had greatly defeated a Kitan force.<sup>2</sup> Long before the tenth century, the Kitan appeared in Sinitic<sup>3</sup> historiography primarily as a lesser power struggling to survive the confrontation

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<sup>1</sup> In history the regime had employed “Liao” and “Kitan” as its dynastic names. My thesis will only use “Liao” to denote the state to avoid confusion. On the Liao dynastic names, see for instance, Liu Pujiang 刘浦江, “Liaochao guohao kaoshi” 辽朝国号考释 [On the Liao dynastic names], *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 (2001:6), pp. 30-44; Daniel Kane, “The Great Central Liao Kitan State,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 43 (2013), pp. 27-50; Liu Fengzhu 刘凤翥, “Qidan dazi ‘Yelü Qi muzhiming’ kaoshi” 契丹大字《耶律祺墓志铭》考释 [On the Kitan Large-Script “Tomb Inscription for Yelü Qi”], *Liao Jin lishi yu kaogu* 辽金历史与考古 7 (2017), pp. 296-98.

<sup>2</sup> Wei Shou 魏收, *Wei shu* 魏書 [Book of Wei] (henceforth *WS*) (554; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 5:88.2223.

<sup>3</sup> Although risking other problems, in general this thesis will employ “Sinitic” to denote “classical Chinese” in order to distance the script/written language from ethnic implications. See Victor H. Mair, “Language and Ideology in the Written Popularizations of the Sacred Edict,” in David Johnson et al. (eds.), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 325-59; Peter Francis

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between great steppe forces of Mongolia and Sinic empires based in northern China, sometimes serving as subordinates of either side, or sometimes causing trouble at frontiers of the two.<sup>4</sup> However, with the fall of the Uighur Qaghanate (744-846) in the Mongolian Plateau during the 840s, a power vacuum arose on the steppe. Then the Tang's central authority also collapsed, especially following an internal empire-wide rebellion which started in 884. It was in this political context that the imperial era of the Kitan came to be.<sup>5</sup>

During the first half of the tenth century, the Liao dynasty had actively extended its authority to the surrounding world. During the reign of the first emperor, Abaoji 阿保機 (r. 907-926), the Liao forces had conquered other nomadic powers to the north and west, and had entered and controlled the previous heartland of the Uighur Qaghanate at Orkhon river valley in 924.<sup>6</sup> Around two years later in 926, Abaoji launched a campaign against the Bohai 渤海 (Parhae) regime (698-926) to their east based in present-day northeast China, resulting in the annexation of the state in the same year and the appointment of his eldest son as ruler of the new territory.<sup>7</sup> There had also been constant conflict and negotiation between Liao and warlords in northern China during the reign of Abaoji, and on occasion the Liao court took

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Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 15-20. Similarly, I will employ "Sinic" instead of "Chinese" when denoting the empires and cultures which originated in present-day northern and southern China.

<sup>4</sup> On the history of Kitan before the tenth century, see Denis Twitchett and Klaus-Peter Tietze, "The Liao," in Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 6, Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 43-153, pp. 47-50.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," pp. 53-60.

<sup>6</sup> Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," pp. 57-58; 65-66.

<sup>7</sup> Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," p. 66.

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advantage of their neighbours' chaos to intervene in affairs of northern China.<sup>8</sup> It was under the second Liao emperor Deguang 德光 (r. 927-947) that the Liao court successfully extended its authority over to northern China, having forged a superior-subordinate relationship with Later Jin 後晉 (936-946) in 936.<sup>9</sup>

Liao continued to be a protagonist in the multi-state system of Eastern Eurasia throughout the following century. For instance, via the conclusion of the Chanyuan Treaty 澶淵之盟 in 1005, Liao acquired the recognition of Northern Song 北宋 (960-1127) as a diplomatic equal, and maintained peaceful relationships between the two powers for over a hundred years.<sup>10</sup> It also became the overlord of multiple regional powers, such as the Tangut (then Xi

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<sup>8</sup> Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," pp. 60-68.

<sup>9</sup> On the Liao-Later Jin relationship, see Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," pp. 68-75; Naomi Standen, "What Nomads Want: Raids, Invasions and the Liao Conquest of 947" in Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (eds.), *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 129-74, pp.142-46; Xue Chen, "Age of Emperors: Divisible Imperial Authority and the Formation of a 'Liao World Order' in Continental East Asia, 900-1250," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 49 (2020), pp. 45-83.

<sup>10</sup> The scholarship on the Liao-Song relations and the Chanyuan Treaty is abundant. See, for instance, Wang Gungwu, "The Rhetoric of a Lesser Empire: Early Sung Relations with Its Neighbors" in Morris Rossabi (ed.), *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th – 14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 47-65; Tao Jinsheng 陶晉生, *Song Liao guanxi shi yanjiu* 宋遼關係史研究 [Studies on the Song-Liao Relations] (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1984); David Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh-Century China: Sung's Foreign Relations with Kitan Liao* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). Furumatsu Takashi 古松崇志, "Kittan-Sō kan no Sen'en taisei ni okeru kokkyō" 契丹・宋間の澶淵体制における国境 [The Border between Khitan and Song under the Chanyuan Treaty System], *Shirin* 史林 90.1 (2007), pp. 28-61; Furumatsu Takashi, "Kittan-Sō kan ni okeru gaikō monjo toshite no chō" 契丹・宋間における外交文書としての牒 [The Use of Die 牒 as Documents in Diplomatic Correspondence between the Khitan and Song Dynasties], *Tōhō gakuho* 東方学報 85 (2010), pp. 271-301; Furumatsu Takashi, "Kittan-Sō kan no kokushinshi to girei" 契丹・宋

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Xia 西夏, 1038-1227) and Koryō 高麗 (918-1392), which had previously paid allegiance to Tang and Song.<sup>11</sup> Although during the early twelfth century the Jurchens, a Manchurian group from northeastern present-day China who established Jin 金 (1115-1234), challenged the Liao authority and eventually toppled Liao, the history of Liao did not come to an end. Rather, the remnants of the Liao court moved westward and relocated to Central Asia. Normally known as Qara Kitan or Western Liao 西遼 (1124-1218), the regime became a

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間の国信使と儀礼 [Envoys for State Letters Exchanged between the Khitan and the Song Dynasties and Associated Rites], *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 73.2 (2014), pp. 63-100; Mori Eisuke 毛利英介, “Ryō Sō kan ni okeru ‘hakusasshi’ no shiyō ni suite: Ryō Sō kan gaikō kōshō no jittai kaimei no tegakari toshite” 遼宋間における「白箭子」の使用について—遼宋間外交交渉の実態解明の手がかりとして [To Clarify the Liao-Song Diplomatic Negotiation through the Use of “Baizhazi” between Liao and Song], in Hirata Shigeki 平田茂樹 and Endō Takatoshi 遠藤隆俊 (eds.), *Gaikō shiryō kara jū-jūshi seiki o saguru* 外交史料から十—十四世紀を語る [Examining the Tenth- to Fourteenth-Century History from Diplomatic Documents] (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2013), pp. 185-210. Melvin Thlick-Len Ang, “Sung-Liao Diplomacy in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century China: A Study of the Social and Political Determinants of Foreign Policy” (University of Pennsylvania Ph.D. diss., 1983), pp. 75-83; Lau Nap-yin and Huang K’uan-chung, “Founding and Consolidation of the Sung Dynasty under T’ai-tsu (960–976), T’ai-tsung (976–997), and Chen-tsung (997–1022),” in Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 5, Part One: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 206-78; Zhang Xiqing 张希清 et al., *Chanyuan zhi meng xinlun* 澶淵之盟新論 [New Reflections on the Chanyuan Treaty] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Mori Eisuke, “Sen kyūjūkyū nen ni okeru Sō Ka Genpu wagi to Ryō Sō jizen kōshō: Ryō Sō heison ki ni okeru kokusai chitsujo no kenkyū” 一〇九九年における宋夏元符和議と遼宋事前交渉—遼宋並存期における國際秩序の研究 [The 1099 Yuanfu Peace Treaty and the Negotiations between Song and Xia: Studies of the Interstate Relations in the Period of Liao-Song Co-existence], *Tōhō gakuho* 東方學報 82 (2008), pp. 119-67; Mori Eisuke, “Jūichi seiki kōhan ni okeru HokuSō no kokusaiteki chii ni suite: Sō Rei tsūkō saikai to Kittan no sonzai o tegakari ni” 十一世紀後半における北宋の國際的地位について—宋麗通交再開と契丹の存在を手がかりに [On the Northern Song’s Place within the Interstate System during the Second Half of the Eleventh Century: The Re-establishment of Song-Koryō Relations and the Presence of the Kitan], in Sōdaishi kenkyūkai 宋代史研究会 (ed.), “*Sōdai chūgoku*” no sōtaika 『宋代中国』の相対化 [The Relativisation of Song China] (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2009), pp. 271-314.

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dominant force in the new land for most of the next hundred years and engaged in cultural and political interaction with other powers of diverse backgrounds.<sup>12</sup>

The role played by Liao in contemporary Eastern Eurasian interstate interactions was more than its leading status in the political hierarchy. The economic network of the Liao Empire, which was centred on the five capitals, extended to the Islamic world in Central and West Asia.<sup>13</sup> Connected to a much wider world far beyond its immediate Northeast Asian neighbours, the Liao state had been an important centre for the exchange of knowledge and materials, and acted as a major force in maintaining the trading networks which scholars normally term the “Steppe Silk Road.”<sup>14</sup> Buddhist culture prospered under constant and increasing Liao official and individual patronage, and the Liao religious practices provided important precedents for later regimes such as Jin and Yuan 元 (1271-1368).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>12</sup> On the history of Qara Kitan, see Michal Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Ma Jianchun 马建春, “Liao yu Xiyu Yisilan diqu jiaopin chutan” 辽与西域伊斯兰地区交聘初探 [Preliminary Investigations of the Relationships between Liao and the Islamic World], *Huizu yanjiu* 回族研究 (2008:1), pp. 95-100; Michal Biran, “Unearthing the Liao Dynasty’s Relations with the Muslim World: Migrations, Diplomacy, Commerce, and Mutual Perceptions,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 43 (2013), pp. 221-51.

<sup>14</sup> Su He 苏赫 and Tian Guanglin 田广林, “Caoyuan sichou zhi lu yu Liaodai Zhong Xi jiaotong” 草原丝绸之路与辽代中西交通 [The Steppe Silk Road and the Interactions between the West and East during the Liao Period] *Zhaowuda Mengzu shizhuan xuebao (Hanwen zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 昭乌达蒙族师专学报 (汉文哲学社会科学版) (1989:4), pp. 1-11; Wu Yuhuan 武玉环 and Cheng Jiajing 程嘉静, “Liaodai dui caoyuan sichou zhi lu de kongzhi yu jingying” 辽代对草原丝绸之路的控制与经营 [The Liao Control and Management of the Steppe Silk Road] (2014:7), pp. 158-62.

<sup>15</sup> Jesse D. Sloane, “Contending States and Religious Orders in Northern China and in East Asian Context, 906-1260” (Princeton University Ph.D. diss., 2010); Liu Pujiang 刘浦江, “Liao Jin de fojiao zhengce jiqi shehui yingxiang” 辽金的佛教政策及其社会影响 [The Liao and Jin Policies on Buddhism and Their



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its statecraft, which combined institutions and political traditions of both Sinic and steppe origins, the creation of native scripts, the systematic construction of cities on the steppe, and the building of what would eventually become present-day Beijing as one of the capitals, also had a great impact on the political and cultural practices of later states, including the final, Qing dynasty 清 (1616-1911).<sup>16</sup>

In recent decades, scholars from various disciplines have become increasingly aware of the importance of Liao in Eastern Eurasian history. Perceived as a non-Han/Chinese regime established in modern China's northern frontier, Liao is now considered to be indispensable in many studies of ethnic, cultural, and interstate interactions in Eastern Eurasian history, and for understanding the historical bases of present-day interethnic and international relationships in Eastern Eurasia and of China's discourses on frontiers and ethnic minorities. The identities of Liao have thus become a popular scholarly topic because of their perceived non-Han/Chinese origins. However, as will be discussed, this is largely for the same reason that discussions of Liao history have generally been framed and asserted via an ethnic binary between Han/Chinese and non-Han/Chinese, and based on the assumption that this ethnicity is central to the understanding of Liao identities.

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Social Impact], *Foxue yanjiu* 佛学研究 5 (1996), pp. 231-38.

<sup>16</sup> See for instance, Franke and Twitchett (eds.), *Cambridge History of China, Vol. 6*; Karl A. Wittfogel and Fêng Chia-Sheng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1949); Daniel Kane, *The Kitan Language and Script* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Jia Zhoujie 贾洲杰, "Liao Jin Yuan shidai Neimenggu diqu de chengshi he chengshi jingji" 辽金元时代内蒙古地区的城市和城市经济 [Cities and Urban Economy in Inner Mongolia during the Liao, Jin, and Yuan Periods] *Neimenggu daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 内蒙古大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) (1979: Z2), pp. 162-69.

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## 2. Dominant research frameworks for Liao identities

In English, the term “Chinese” in fact normally refers to the Han 漢. The Han – usually perceived as an ethnic group or nationality – constitute the majority of present-day multiethnic China’s population, according to official claims. Although there are fifty-five other officially recognised ethnic “minorities,” those classified as Han have been deemed to comprise more than ninety percent of the whole population of the People’s Republic of China since the first National Population Census in 1953. Thus the Han and relevant aspects – such as their culture and history – have constantly been regarded as interchangeable with concepts such as Chinese/China, Chinese culture, and Chinese history, and employed as such. As Thomas S. Mullaney has proposed, Han and China are intertwined with one another in “at least three ways” – “the long-standing commensuration between Han and ‘Chinese culture’ ”; a long-standing equivalence between Han and “the Chinese people”; and “the intimate relationship between Han and the political-geographic concept of China.”<sup>17</sup>

But the above approaches towards Han and China/Chinese summarised by Mullaney do not cover the entire issue. It is worth noting that scholars have different conventions for the use of the terms “Han” and “Chinese” when referring to the perceived historical and present ethnic

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas S. Mullaney, “Critical Han Studies: Introduction and Prolegomenon,” in Thomas S. Mullaney et al. (eds.), *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation and Identity of China's Majority* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 1-20, p. 4; For studies on the Han, also see for instance, Agnieszka Joniak-L üthi, *The Han: China's Diverse Majority* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015).

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majority of China. For some scholars, the terms “Chinese” and “Han” are used synonymously. However, for most citizens in present-day China, and for scholars in the field of Chinese studies or who aim to be cautious about the terminology, Han and Chinese, although always intertwined with one another, are clearly different concepts. For them, it is the term *Zhongguo ren* 中國人 or *Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族 rather than the Han that in present-day China work as collective terms which better correspond to the English “Chinese (people)” or “Chinese nationality,” which in China’s context includes Han and other fifty-five ethnic minorities. In order to avoid confusion, throughout the remainder of the thesis, depending on contextual requirements I shall employ the specific term “Han” or “Han/Chinese,” rather than simply “Chinese,” to denote the perceived ethnic majority of China.

The Han is not only viewed to comprise the largest population of modern China, but has also been considered to be the majority in historical China and the core of its entire history. But historical dynasties were by no means exclusively Han-dominated. The identity of a historical dynasty as either Han or non-Han has usually been defined by the ethnic identity of the group which provided a dynasty with its imperial house.<sup>18</sup> For instance, the major reason that scholars tend to treat Liao as a non-Han regime is because the dynasty’s emperors were of the Kitan, despite the fact that Han comprised the largest Liao population. The same principle has been applied to other regimes such as the Jin, Yuan, and Qing dynasties in most scholarly works. Thus although many historians have perceived Jin, Yuan, and Qing as multiethnic and

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<sup>18</sup> Sloane, “Contending States,” p. 47. The identity of a nomadic tribal group was understood in a similar way. See discussions by Rudi Paul Lindner, “What Was a Nomadic Tribe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24.4 (1982), pp. 689-711.

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as disproportionally having larger population labelled by scholars as Han, the identities of these regimes were normally regarded as non-Han defined by identities of their ruling houses – the Jurchen, the Mongols, and the Manchu. Therefore we must bear in mind that the Kitan, for instance, and the ascribed ethnicity to the Liao ruling clans, were different from Liao as a regime. The Kitan were only part of the Liao state, although the state's identity has generally been classified as "Kitan."

### **Two dominant frameworks and their problems**

Scholarship on Liao identities normally follows a paradigm of ethnic dichotomy between the Han and non-Han. This paradigm is maintained in the present most strongly by the explicit and implicit acceptance of two key ideas. One favours the framework of sinicisation which as Pamela Crossley precisely summarises conveys the implication that the non-Han are " 'to become Han', or to become culturally indistinguishable from mainstream Chinese society."<sup>19</sup> It treats the Han culture as a more superior one, and the history in Eastern Eurasia as primarily a process of the Han assimilating thus also civilising the non-Han.<sup>20</sup> This supposed assimilating process of non-Han groups in the long-run is considered to have led to non-Han's ethnic identification with the Han, or with the collective identity of Chinese.<sup>21</sup> As

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<sup>19</sup> Pamela Kyle Crossley, *Orphan Warriors: Three Manchu Generations and the End of the Qing World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 223; for a similar argument, see her "Thinking about Ethnicity in Early Modern China," *Late Imperial China* 11 (1990), pp. 1-35, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed literature review of "sinicisation," see Marc Samuel Abramson, "Deep Eyes and High Noses: Constructing Ethnicity in Tang China (618-907)" (Princeton University Ph.D. diss., 2001), pp. 56-70.

<sup>21</sup> Abramson, "Deep Eyes and High Noses," p. 57.

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commonly held by historians who favour theories of sinicisation, the adoption of so-called Han elements by the non-Han, such as the cultivation of Han language and literature, the construction of a Han ancestry, the veneration of Confucianism, or the employment of political institutions of Han regimes, was an important indicator of being sinicised.<sup>22</sup> For some historians, the adoption of these aspects resulted in the eventual disappearance of previously distinct non-Han peoples. They were perceived to have been absorbed into the Han, or into a greater Chinese community whose core culture was defined by Han.<sup>23</sup>

In this framework, the Han culture/civilisation is viewed as having a centripetal power, like a magnet drawing in other peoples, e.g. the Kitan, under its influence. Liao identities thus become an issue of how the Kitan, from which the Liao imperial house originated, became culturally and mentally increasingly more like the Han and contributed to the shaping of a greater Chinese world leading up to the formation of modern China.<sup>24</sup> However, we should note that on many occasions the incorporation of the so-called Han elements was pragmatic – they were useful tools for establishing a new type of authority and for strengthening central power. The borrowing of Han civil principles and institutions, for instance, was thus “not of a process of sinicization or acculturation, but of the creation of a different society and political order,” and the major goal was to consolidate “central authority” and to preserve “ethnic

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<sup>22</sup> See for instance, two articles by Ping-Ti Ho, “The Significance of the Ch’ing Period in Chinese History,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26 (1967), pp. 189-95; and “In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski’s ‘Reenvisioning the Qing’,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57 (1998), pp. 123-55.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance, Harry J. Lamley, “Subethnic Rivalry in the Ch’ing Period,” in Emily Martin Ahern and Hill Gates (eds.), *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), pp. 282-318.

<sup>24</sup> Specific references will be made later when discussing relevant topics.

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identity.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, as Crossley has argued for the Manchu of the Qing dynasty, the non-Han were not “duplications” of the Han, and the theory of sinicisation overlooks the dimension of Manchu “self-identification.”<sup>26</sup> Theories of sinicisation as an explanation normally neglect the distinction between cultural change and ethnic change.<sup>27</sup> While non-Han may have become accustomed to Han cultural practices and demonstrated a greater amount of similarities with the Han, they may still identify themselves as having non-Han identities.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the theories of sinicisation trap us into a Han and non-Han binary, which not only constructs a hegemonic discourse which hierarchises different cultures, but is also overly simplistic when it comes to interpreting the ethnic changes of the non-Han.

There is another dominant idea which provides a counter-narrative to the theories framed around sinicisation, arguing that the Kitan or other non-Han groups were mostly nativists and long maintained various boundaries, including cultural and political ones, between themselves and the Han. For studies on regimes with northern origins, e.g. Liao, the most popular concept is “conquest dynasties” introduced by Karl A. Wittfogel in his *History of Chinese Society: Liao*. Primarily defined by a dichotomy between Chinese and non-Chinese

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<sup>25</sup> Nicola Di Cosmo, “Review of *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368* by Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett,” in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 56.2 (1996), pp. 493-508, pp. 504-7.

<sup>26</sup> Crossley, *Orphan Warriors*, p. 223.

<sup>27</sup> See discussions by Crossley, “Thinking about Ethnicity,” pp. 1-35; Melissa J. Brown, “On Becoming Chinese,” in Melissa J. Brown (ed.), *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1996), pp. 37-74; Naomi Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossing in Liao China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007), pp. 26-32.

<sup>28</sup> Abramson, “Deep Eyes and High Noses,” p. 7; Marc Samuel Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. xix-xi.

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(as he terms them), he divides the “history of imperial China” into two groups – “typically Chinese dynasties” and “dynasties of conquest (and ‘infiltration’).”<sup>29</sup> Liao was the first “conquest dynasty” which set a pattern of conquest for subsequent non-Han regimes – Jin, led by the Jurchen; Yuan, by the Mongols; and Qing, by the Manchu.<sup>30</sup> Wittfogel proposes the idea of “a third culture,” by which he refers to the new forms of cultural elements which grew out of both the native and introduced Han cultures, such as the Kitan script, based on the Sinitic script, which was an innovation for traditional Kitan society, but also distinct from Sinitic.<sup>31</sup> However, this “third culture,” as Wittfogel argues, only “coordinated” both native and introduced cultures as opposed to resulting in a “complete fusion” of the two.<sup>32</sup> As for the Liao regime, he points out that the political and military centre of Liao remained in its tribal regions, and the Kitan elites never lost their native traditions, religions or nomadic lifestyle, although many Han cultural elements were absorbed into them.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the Liao dynasty, as did the later “conquest dynasties,” maintained a binary system, implementing different cultural and political policies and institutions for nomadic and secondary peoples, maintaining effective boundaries between them.<sup>34</sup> The acceptance of Han culture by the Kitan, as Wittfogel argues, was “selective,”<sup>35</sup> and the Kitan did not become Han.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *Liao*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>30</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *Liao*, p. 3; pp. 8-14.

<sup>31</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *Liao*, p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *Liao*, p. 20

<sup>33</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *Liao*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *Liao*, pp. 434-49.

<sup>35</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *Liao*, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *Liao*, p. 7.

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The “conquest dynasties” theory has a worldwide impact on later scholarly works concerning regimes with northern non-Han origins. For instance, some recent scholarship, though focusing on the Qing dynasty has drawn much from the theory of “conquest dynasties” and casts Liao, along with others such as Xi Xia, Jin, Yuan and Qing, as a distinct non-Han regime which did not centre on Han culture and civilisation but rather resisted sinicisation and maintained boundaries between the Han and non-Han.<sup>37</sup> For instance, Evelyn S. Rawski argues that the achievement of Qing, “at least in terms of empire-building, lay in its cultural links with the non-Han peoples of Inner Asia and to differentiate the administration of the non-Han regions from the administration of the former Ming provinces,”<sup>38</sup> and that there had been a separation and hierarchy between the “conquest elite” and the Han.<sup>39</sup> As she contends, Manchu rulers skilfully demonstrated their “different images of rulership to the different subject peoples of their empire,” and “the core of the Qing policy was a universal rulership based on the submission of divergent peoples, whose cultures would remain separate.”<sup>40</sup> These aspects which characterised Qing rulership, as Rawski argues, could find their way from earlier non-Han regimes – Liao, Jin, Xi Xia, and Yuan, all of which in her view resisted to be sinicised, shown by their creation of new “national scripts,” imposition of different

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<sup>37</sup> For instance, Evelyn S. Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 4 (1996), pp. 829-50; Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing,” p. 831.

<sup>39</sup> Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing,” p. 832.

<sup>40</sup> Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing,” pp. 834-35.



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administrations and institutions according to ethnic differences, etc.<sup>41</sup> Another scholar, Mark C. Elliott raises the concept of “ethnic sovereignty,” which denotes the predominant place the Manchu emperors had possessed “at the apex of a universal empire composed of multiple hierarchies of lordship based on differing types of authority.”<sup>42</sup> Two important aspects of this “ethnic sovereignty” were “instilling fear in the Han” and “preserving the integrity of the conquest people,” which were key to “non Han groups like the Manchus to maintain control.”<sup>43</sup> In Elliott’s view, “maintaining differentiation between conqueror and conquered” has been the core to “ethnic sovereignty,” and “essential to the vitality of all Inner Asian dynasties.”<sup>44</sup> Again, these features of Qing rulership, as he argues, were in line with much older Inner Asian traditions since the Liao dynasty.<sup>45</sup>

The above scholarship on the conquest dynasties relies on the basic idea that there had always been a historical and consciously constructed divide between the Han on one side and the non-Han on the other. It seems the boundaries with Han are perceived as inherent to the ethnic consciousness of the non-Han dynasties. However, besides the danger of exaggerating the distinctions between the so-called Inner Asian and Han/Chinese worlds, this is in fact another type of Sinocentric ideology. Non-Han peoples and dynasties in this framework can be grouped together simply because they were not Han. The so-called Inner Asian world, despite its recognised internal diversity, has been seen in much of this scholarship as one

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<sup>41</sup> Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing,” p. 837

<sup>42</sup> Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>44</sup> Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, pp. 5-6.

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entity,<sup>46</sup> groups within which are lumped together primarily to serve as a contrast with the Han, whose culture, civilisation, and discourse have always been at the centre of either critique or compliments.

The two dominant frameworks mentioned above in fact rarely deny cultural interaction and exchange between what they call Han and non-Han. The divergence of arguments is primarily about whether the non-Han maintain their original identities. As articulated above, while the theories of sinicisation see the non-Han, e.g. Kitan, as increasingly identifying themselves with either Han or a greater Chinese world, the counter-narrative considers them to have maintained native identities based on their non-Han elements and the boundaries with Han. But the task of this thesis is not to re-examine whether the Kitan and the Liao state were really “sinicised” or changed their ethnic identification. Rather, from a more fundamental level it rethinks the effectiveness of the analytical concept of ethnicity and the ethnic binary between Han and non-Han applied to the Liao history by the two dominant frameworks. It raises the question of whether aspects related to identities of the Kitan elite and Liao should always be explained via ethnic discourse.

### **3. Beyond ethnicity**

We find that the discourse of ethnicity is normally absent in discussions on

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<sup>46</sup> Liao, Xi Xia, Jin, and Yuan, although often grouped by scholars as “Inner Asian” regimes, they in fact had “substantial differences.” See, for instance, Di Cosmo, “Review of *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 6.”

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interstate/intergroup relationships between those perceived to be Han – e.g. between the southern kingdoms of the tenth century. But, as previously mentioned, because of perceived non-Han origins, discussions on identities of the Kitan and Liao have constantly been framed via the discourse of ethnicity and through an ethnic binary/division between Han and non-Han. Despite their opposing stances, one problem the two aforementioned dominant frameworks have in common is that scholars have always presupposed what were Han and what were non-Han elements. The ethnic thinking is perceived to be always dominant in the minds of research subjects, who are assumed to have always faced a choice of crossing or not crossing a line between native ethnic identity and Han identity. For instance, Confucianism is constantly treated as a Han or Chinese doctrine, and scholarly debate on the identity issues of non-Han are normally centred on whether their cultivation of Confucian knowledge should be seen as being sinicised.

Whether they favour theories of sinicisation or not, scholars often conduct their discussions without carefully examining or even being aware of one fundamental issue in the first place. To be precise, as the following chapters will discuss, many scholars have *ethnicised* elements which did not bear ethnic implications or were irrelevant to ethnicity, and have assumed that the non-Han elite had always interacted with the Han with good knowledge of what were and were not Han elements. To be more specific, scholars favouring either one of the aforementioned two dominant frameworks may have debated over issues such as whether a non-Han was willing to learn Han culture or consciously resisted Han culture, and whether a non-Han wanted to assert a Han identity or retain a native identity. But the basis for these

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discussions to work is that for the non-Han, the Han identity must have been a tangible and clear target to assert or to resist. However, in fact historians have constantly overlooked non-Han's own ideas towards those elements with Han origins, decided on their behalf what should be perceived by them as Han, and have rarely seriously examined issues such as whether the non-Han knew clearly which elements were Han and which were native, or whether the so-called non-Han really associated the borrowed elements from Han with a concrete Han other.

### **General definition of ethnic identity and its problems**

As some scholars have pointed out, there is in fact no definite definition for what constitutes an ethnic group. As proposed by anthropologists, an ethnic group normally consists of several core elements, which differentiate one group from another. For instance, Donald L. Horowitz has suggested that an ethnic group upholds the idea of common provenance, recruitment primarily through kinship, and a notion of distinctiveness whether or not this consists of a unique inventory of cultural traits.<sup>47</sup> And as Anthony D. Smith tentatively summarises, for him an ethnic group normally has the following features:

A myth of common ancestry, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnies a sense of fictive kinship...; shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration; one or more elements of common

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<sup>47</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 41.

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culture, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language.<sup>48</sup>

However, these general observations sometimes generate more questions than they answer, whether this be in fields concerning premodern or modern times. As Fredric Barth has pointed out via his articulation of the concept of ethnic boundaries, it is the “maintenance of a boundary” that ensures the “continuity of ethnic units.” While the boundary between ethnic groups may have been penetrated through time, “[t]he cultural features that signal the boundary may change.”<sup>49</sup> That means, when we use the terms such as Han, Kitan or Mongol today, the connotations of what makes up a Han, a Kitan or a Mongol may have already changed compared to an equivalent in a particular historical period. As Barth has advanced, certain cultural elements that were historically “included” in an ethnic unit may well be “excluded” from it in present day, and are thus no longer effective ethnic markers.<sup>50</sup> For instance, as is commonly known, many anti-Manchu Han elite during the late Ming and early Qing emphasised the importance of Han customs represented by, for example, the Ming attire. But clearly this Ming style clothing which was used by the Ming elite to define the Han identity does not define Han in present-day China, which is much more diverse and to some extent influenced by the “West.”

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<sup>48</sup> John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Fredric Barth, “Introduction,” in Fredric Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown And Company, 1969), pp. 9-38, p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> Barth, “Introduction,” p. 12.

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And to push Barth's observation further, I argue that even if a perceived historical ethnic group, with its label, has "discontinued" and is now absent or unrecognisable in the present day, historians may still understand its core elements according to what make up an ethnic group in modern context. For example, in modern scholarship a constructed common ancestry has been considered a core element marking an ethnic group. It has been constantly applied to premodern cases as a key to distinguish between ethnic units. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter III, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, just like many elites and ruling families with Han origin, the Liao ruling clans had increasingly identified themselves as descendants of mythical sage kings canonised in Sinitic classics, such as Huangdi 黃帝 (Yellow Emperor). And in contemporary Song sources, the Kitan can also be traced back to nomadic groups perceived by Song historians as descended from Huangdi. However, because the Liao elite had constructed genealogies cognate with the Han, and in modern historiography these ancient sages and monarchs are treated as Han/Chinese figures, Liao ruling clans are thus considered by scholars to have claimed a "Han" or "Chinese" ancestry, and that the phenomenon represents the Liao identification with either Han or the membership as part of Chinese world. But we must bear in mind that during the Liao dynasty the cultural, political and social binary between Han and Kitan, and the two labels, never ceased to exist, and for Song a shared origin did not lead the Song elite to cease the treatment of Liao elite as non-Han barbarians. This means a common ancestry cannot be treated as one of the key (ethnic) markers to differentiate between Kitan and Han at the time, either in Liao or Song.

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The above discussion has shown that the application of ethnicity to premodern cases can generate problems. In modern scholarship, by means of employing the discourse of ethnicity, scholars tend to pre-ascribe many elements with ethnic implications and treat them as natural constituents of ethnic identity, or markers naturally defining ethnic identification. In research from the fields of Eastern Eurasian and Chinese studies, some scholars “sinicised” many elements before careful examination of whether these elements were understood as exclusively Han in historical times, or whether they are simply universal cultural legacies. Scholars who favour theories of sinicisation, as mentioned above, have normally ascribed elements such as Confucianism, Sinitic, or certain historical/mythical figures (e.g. Huangdi) with a Han/Chinese identity. In this case, it is not surprising to see that they would perceive the non-Han who borrowed these elements as being “sinicised.” And for some scholars who are opponents of the framework of sinicisation, there is nevertheless the same problem. For them, the adoption of elements which fall outside their definition of Han would be an indication of the non-Han’s resistance to the Han culture or adherence to native traditions, and the cultural borrowings with Sinic origins are normally interpreted as realistic strategies to please their Han supporters rather than something that could be internalised by non-Han as their own. In short, whether for or against the theories of sinicisation, the underlying assumptions of which were Han elements and which were not Han elements have not been questioned. The “sinicisation” as a framework remains in place.

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## Multiple identities

It is true that ethnic-like labels – the Kitan, Han, Bohai, Jurchen did indeed exist, at least in many of our materials, but we must bear in mind that this kind of identity was just one of the many identities of historical figures. Through the lens of ethnicity, we may filter out other critical information beyond the category's capability to provide explanation, and may misinterpret phenomena irrelevant to ethnic identity as framed by that category. We should be cautious about the presupposition, as Barth has misleadingly made, that "ethnic identity is superordinate to most other statuses" of one person, and "constrains the incumbent in all his activities."<sup>51</sup> If scholars regard ethnic identity as always possessing such a superior position among one's multiple identities, then it is not surprising that the relations between Liao and its neighbours in northern China, as Naomi Standen has pointed out, have normally been treated as "ethnic encounters" between Han and non-Han.<sup>52</sup> But as reminded by Aneta Pavlenko and Adrian Blackledge in their studies of linguistics and identity, we need to pay more attention to the multiplicity of identity, rather than always give privilege to "a single aspect of identity...at the expense of others." As they have specified, "identities are constructed at the interstices of multiple axes, such as age, race, class, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitical locale, institutional affiliation, and social status, whereby each aspect of identity redefines and modifies all others. Since individuals often shift and adjust ways in which they identify and position themselves in distinct contexts, identities are best understood when approached in their entirety rather than through

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<sup>51</sup> Barth, "Introduction," p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, p. 29.



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consideration of a single aspect or subject position.”<sup>53</sup> Therefore, for example, the constructed ancestry of a group can be understood not just in ethnic terms, but also within other frameworks such as noble or undistinguished, heroic or evil, ancient or more recent.

Certainly, there have been efforts to distinguish other identities from ethnic identity. As some scholars have pointed out, in some scholarship ethnic identity has been given equivalence to cultural identities, when the two should be carefully distinguished. Crossley employs the term “ethnisation” to denote the “alienizing process” between different human groups.<sup>54</sup> As she argues, “ethnic consciousness” as a phenomenon is not “self-evident” but a product of imperial culture.<sup>55</sup> In the context of Chinese history, it emerged only since the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and was shaped primarily by contemporary “political, cultural and psychological power,” especially since the Taiping War (1850-1864) when Manchu-Han tensions had been greatly intensified.<sup>56</sup> Although there has been debate over whether ethnic identity can be applied to premodern history of China,<sup>57</sup> it reminds us of the necessity to distinguish ethnic identity from cultural identity (defined by a set of cultural traits such as religion and language). As Standen also puts it, distinctions between cultures only became ethnic markers when they were imbued with “political meaning” and cultural identity only turned into ethnic identity when it began to serve as “the basis for asserting or claiming

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<sup>53</sup> Aneta Pavlenko and Adrian Blackledge, “Introduction,” in Aneta Pavlenko and Adrian Blackledge (eds.), *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts* (Clevedon: Cromwell Press, 2004), pp. 1-33, p. 16.

<sup>54</sup> Crossley, “Thinking about Ethnicity,” p. 26.

<sup>55</sup> Crossley, “Thinking about Ethnicity,” p. 26-27.

<sup>56</sup> Crossley, *Orphan Warriors*, pp. 5-6; “Thinking about Ethnicity,” pp. 27-28.

<sup>57</sup> For instance, in his *Manchu Way* Elliot considers ethnicity a useful analytical category for studying the Manchu and Qing history before the nineteenth century.

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advantage (social, economic, but above all political).”<sup>58</sup> As Abramson similarly points out, “one could be culturally Chinese but retain non-Han ethnic markers and even identity, as was the case for the inhabitants, particularly the elites, of many empires throughout history.”<sup>59</sup>

While this existing scholarship has insightfully underscored the importance to distinguish ethnic identity from cultural traits/identity, I will emphasise the necessity of differentiating not just Han cultures (or other elements such as ancestries) from Han ethnic identity, but “Han” from “culture”: that is to disengage the “Han/Chinese” label from the elements (culture traits, ancestry, etc.) it denotes. As for the distinction between Han ethnic identity and Han cultural identity, this must carry the premise that for the non-Han there was a concrete Han other, and that they associated certain cultural elements they had absorbed with this Han other. Only based on this premise does the separation of Han ethnic identity from cultural identity work. In other cases, the employment of the term “Han cultural identity” is itself problematic, because the concept still assumes that this is a culture of Han, implying the ownership of a certain cultural element by Han rather than others, the label of which remains in the ethnic sense. But we must ask this: do we really know that for the non-Han, cultural elements such as Huangdi, Sinitic, and Confucianism were perceived as “Han” things?

Thus for our present study of Liao, what we need to examine relates less to whether the Liao elite who committed themselves to cultures/elements with Sinic origin identified themselves as “Han” people, but more about whether they recognised and showed awareness of that the

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<sup>58</sup> Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> Abramson, “Deep Eyes and High Noses,” p. 7; Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China*, p. xi.

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elements to which they committed were really “Han things” in their times. As mentioned, in studies about Liao and its ruling families, the elements defining their identity as either nativists or sinicised nomads have normally been religion (Buddhism vs. Confucianism), written language (Sinitic vs. Kitan), constructed origins (nomadic ancestry vs. Han ancestry), etc. But the questions we will examine include those such as: did the Liao elite perceive these elements as having ethnic implications indicating Han or non-Han identities? To be more specific and to take the ancestry as an example, we need to ask whether the Kitan were aware that their constructed ancestry was associated with the ethnic “Han”? Did the Liao elite understand these elements as “Han” or simply as common legacies with foreign origins which could be appropriated as their own? As we shall see in detail later, the Liao ruling elite had a very different idea of the ownership of many historical legacies with Sinic origins. What present-day scholars may see as Han/Chinese ancestries were not understood necessarily by the Liao elite as figures *of* Han/Chinese, but in a more neutralised sense as a legacy of antiquity which anyone could lay claim to.

### **Other possible analytical categories**

Since ethnicity does not suffice to explain many historical cases involving behaviours which seem to have “transgress[ed] ethnic boundaries,” categories other than ethnicity are required.<sup>60</sup> In Standen’s works, instead of employing the term “ethnicity,” the definition of which was unknown to the tenth century people, she uses the concept of *zhong* (忠 loyalty) as an analytical category, which was familiar to our historical actors. By the means of detailed

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<sup>60</sup> Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, p. 26.

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case studies and locating the understandings of *zhong* within particular historical contexts, Standen convincingly demonstrates that in the tenth century it was the distinct perception of *zhong* that was crucial and central in guiding the actions of educated elites of the Five Dynasties, affecting their behaviour and decision making, such as active border crossings and shifts in political allegiance. The modern formulations such as ethnic considerations, or a nationalist association between loyalty and territories, however, were absent and therefore irrelevant.

Another example of new categories is to be found in Fan Wenli's work. Fan does not dismiss the concept of ethnicity, but devises a new term *Daibei jituan* 代北集團 (Daibei Group) as the core of his analyses, which is framed by geographical location. Daibei in Fan's definition roughly refers to present-day northern Shanxi 山西, western Hebei 河北 and the middle part of Inner Mongolia, a region which was long open to intensive ethnic/cultural interaction. Since the late Tang period, this area became the base of and was central to a political-military group with Shatuo Turks as its core. Members from this group provided the ruling elite for three perceived Shatuo dynasties – Later Tang, Later Jin and Later Han, and two dynasties with so-called Han origin – Later Zhou 後周 (951-960) and Northern Song. Fan demonstrates that, while its members were from various ethnic backgrounds, they were bound together through political and military ties shaped since late Tang times. Ethnic considerations, such as discrimination derived from ethnic distinctions, as Fan points out, were nearly absent in the Daibei region.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Fan Wenli 樊文礼, "Tangmo Wudai de Daibei jituan" 唐末五代的代北集团 [The Daibei Group in the

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As will be detailed in the following chapters, this study will also propose three categories to examine the dynastic identities of Liao – the imperial designations, constructed genealogies of the two Liao ruling clans, and the perceived place of Liao in cosmos/geographical space. Of course, the above discussion of alternative categories does not mean that I will dismiss the concept of ethnicity. We do face a problem, namely, if we cannot find an ideal definition for ethnicity, or the constituting core elements of a so-call ethnic group/identity are always subject to change, how do we know what we are talking about is an “ethnic” thing, and why shouldn’t we dismiss the concept of ethnicity all together? This is because no matter how the elements constituting a perceived ethnic group (e.g. Han or Kitan) were in flux, changed over time and how difficult it has been to define it, we nevertheless do have such historically existing specific labels as Han or Kitan which differentiated human groups which cannot simply be defined by other identities, such as professional, gender, or party identity, etc.<sup>62</sup>

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Late Tang and the Five Dynasties Periods] (Zhejiang University Ph.D. diss., 1999); Also see his *Tangmo Wudai de Daibei jituan* 唐末五代的代北集团 [The Daibei Group in the Late Tang and the Five Dynasties Periods] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2000); “Shilun Tangmo Wudai Daibei jituan de xingcheng” 试论唐末五代代北集团的形成 [On the Formation of the Daibei Group in the Late Tang and the Five Dynasties Periods], *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究 (2002: 2), pp. 54-62; “Zailun Tangmo Wudai Daibei jituan de chengli” 再论唐末五代代北集团的成立 [Further Reflections on the Formation of the Daibei Group in the Late Tang and the Five Dynasties Periods], *Yantai daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 烟台大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) 27.3 (2014), pp. 90-99.

<sup>62</sup> Scholars who are collectively known as “instrumentalists” consider ethnic boundaries as shaped by competition over resources. But as Wang Ming-ke has pointed out, they cannot satisfactorily explain the differences between ethnic identity and other identities (national, class, etc.): the formation of the latter is also largely shaped by competition over resources. See Wang Ming-ke 王明珂, *Huaxia bianyuan: lishi jiyi yu zuqun rentong* 华夏边缘：历史记忆与族群认同 [Peripheries of Huaxia: Historical Memories and Ethnic Identification] (Taibei: Yunchen wenhua, 1997). For opinions of “instrumentalist” scholars, see for

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We simply consider these labels (e.g. Han and Kitan) to mark something we wish to collectively call and perceive as “ethnic identity,” in order to differentiate them from other categories. And in history, a sense similar to modern ethnic consciousness also existed and some such labels have lived on to the present, while the nature of which certainly may have changed a lot. In other words, it seems that when we talk about what is ethnic identity and what is an ethnic group, it is all about the label itself. Because although scholars have attempted to define an ethnic group, the only thing that remains unchanged in discussions of “ethnic identity” has always been the label rather than what constitutes the identity marked by the label. For instance, what defines Han has been discussed for centuries and there has been no unanimous agreement on the issue. But the debate has always framed itself around the very concept of “Han” and we are always willing to treat it as an ethnic identity, no matter how diversely it would be defined.

Therefore, we need not completely reject calling the consciousness and ideologies shaped around the labels of Kitan or Han “ethnic” thinking, or to dismiss the labels as “ethnic” markers. To leave out the discussion of whether Kitan and Han are ethnic or cultural identities and what ethnic identity is does not affect the analysis of the present studies, because the three topics discussed in this thesis, as outlined above, in many cases are not relevant to the discourse of ethnic identity. On the one hand, the Liao ruling elite in many aspects had absorbed and practised cultures with Sinic origins, but neither had they ceased the binary between Kitan and Han, nor did the native elite identify them with Han identity. On the other

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instance, Leo A. Despres, “Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Guyanese Society,” in Leo A. Despres (ed.), *Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Plural Societies* (Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1975), pp. 87-117.

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hand, although the labels of Han and Kitan remained, many cultural elements were understood not as something of Han or exclusively owned by Han but as common legacies from antiquity and were internalised and appropriated by the Liao elite into Liao society as part of their own, or treated as part of “native” culture and history. Thus this work does not bother to dismiss Han or Kitan as ethnic labels or debate over whether they really represented ethnic identity. For convenience I may employ terms such as “with Han (or Sinic, in a broader sense) origins” to indicate cultural elements which originated from such a loosely defined group, such as imperial designations, ancestries and discourses concerning the cosmic structure, but intend no indication of their exclusivity of ownership. While using the labels (Han or Kitan) loosely in ethnic sense, I will not in the first place treat cultural elements or practices adopted by the Liao elite as ethnic markers or assume that the Liao elite must have imbued these elements with ethnic thinking.

#### **4. Sources and a discussion on their recording languages**

It has been a consensus among historians that Liao history suffers a dearth of written sources of its own.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, in general the materials for Liao history, including those concerning the Liao dynastic identities, are not as abundant as those for its neighbours based in so-called China proper. For the Liao dynasty there is only one official history – *Liao shi* – compiled in

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<sup>63</sup> See for instance, Liu Pujiang 刘浦江, “Qiongjin pangtong yuliu: Liao Jin shi yanjiu de kun’e yu chulu” 穷尽 旁通 预流: 辽金史研究的困厄与出路 [Exhaustiveness, Comprehensiveness, and Enlightenment: The Difficulties in the Liao Jin Studies and the Possible Solutions], *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 (2009:6), pp. 24-29.

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the late Mongol Yuan period, over two hundred years after the demise of Liao.<sup>64</sup> The *LS* has long been criticised as early as the Qing period for being too short to provide enough information and filled with errors. But fortunately for examining Liao identities there is information in other types of sources besides the *LS*. The diplomatic documents frequently exchanged between Liao and its neighbours, especially those with Northern Song and Koryŏ are preserved in Song and Koryŏ sources, and the ever increasing number of archaeological findings (esp. tomb inscriptions) excavated from former Liao districts, have provided us with sufficient evidence to work with.

### **Tomb inscriptions**

In this thesis, Liao tombs inscriptions will be a major source for investigating the Liao native perspective.<sup>65</sup> These inscriptions have two major advantages. First, they represent the ideas of the Liao ruling elite. As scholars have pointed out, epitaphs were an integral part of the funereal rituals which were costly and only members of the elite class with substantial wealth

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<sup>64</sup> Tuotuo 脱脱 et al., *Liao shi* 遼史 [History of Liao] (henceforth *LS*) (1343; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974).

<sup>65</sup> Most of the inscriptional evidence for this thesis has been collected in Xiang Nan 向南 (ed.), *Liaodai shike wenbian* 遼代石刻文編 [Collections of Liao Stone Inscriptions] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995); Gai Zhiyong 盖之庸, *Neimenggu Liaodai shike wen yanjiu* 内蒙古辽代石刻文研究 [Studies of Liao Stone Inscriptions Discovered in Inner Mongolia] (Hohhot: Neimenggu daxue chubanshe, 2002); Wang Jingchen 王晶辰, *Liaoning beizhi* 辽宁碑志 [Stone Inscriptions Discovered in Liaoning] (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2002); Xiang Nan 向南 et al. (eds.), *Liaodai shike wen xubian* 辽代石刻文续编 [Sequel of Collections of Liao Stone Inscriptions] (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2010); Liu Fengzhu 劉鳳翥 (ed.), *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian* 契丹文字研究類編 [Compilation of Studies of Kitan Scripts] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014).



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could afford the expense.<sup>66</sup> They were “the most versatile, widespread, and persistent commemorative form employed in medieval elite burial and those of the later eras as well.”<sup>67</sup> During the Liao period, it was the Liao elite who played an active and dominant role in shaping the native discourse of Liao identities. The interpretations from these physical items were thus an integral part of the ongoing formation of Liao identity construction and discourse.

In addition, Liao inscriptions contain records which “express the values and ideals of the society of the time.”<sup>68</sup> They mirrored the discourses the Liao elite were familiar with in the historical context of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the information that the Liao elite considered to be worthy of writing down for the tomb owner. These records were part of *their own* history accepted by individual families of the deceased.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, tomb inscriptions to a large extent could reflect messages intended for public consumption. Although they were prepared for the deceased, what was written down in the inscriptions did not serve the tomb owner alone but could speak to different audiences including the people of the future, since there was an awareness of the possibility of the tomb

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<sup>66</sup> Beverly J. Bossler, *Powerful Relations: Kinship, Status, and the State in Sung China (960–1279)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1998), p. 10; Nicolas Tackett, *Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), p. 16.

<sup>67</sup> Timothy M. Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy and Commemorative Culture in Early Medieval China: A History of Early Muzhiming* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Tackett, *Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*, p. 13.

<sup>69</sup> Also see Davis’s discussion on “collective memory and family history” in his *Entombed Epigraphy*, pp. 69-72.

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being unearthed, and the texts of the inscriptions may also be recorded and circulated among literati.<sup>70</sup> In addition, besides the information provided by the family of the deceased, sources for writing a tomb inscription sometimes also involved official materials, which would be consulted by writers of the inscriptions and accepted by the family of the deceased and thus could reflect an intervention by official discourses in the content of the inscription writings.<sup>71</sup>

Of course, normally the writing of tomb inscriptions was not aimed at a public audience as a priority but rather served as “private” commemorative records for individual purposes. After all, they were prepared for the deceased and would be buried with them underground, which means compared with official documents they could demonstrate a kind of “privacy” preserved for the deceased.<sup>72</sup> This “privacy,” instead of indicating the information of tomb inscriptions always being a secret, means that the inscriptions were primarily composed for the deceased as part of their sacred burial ritual and were taken underground as their “private objects/information.” The sources provided by the family of the deceased for the composition

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<sup>70</sup> Jie Shi, “My Tomb Will Be Opened in Eight Hundred Years: A New Way of Seeing the Afterlife in Six Dynasties China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 72.2 (2012), pp. 217-57; Tackett, *Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*, pp. 16-17; Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy*, p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Xu Chong 徐冲, “Cong ‘yike’ xianxiang kan Bei Wei houqi muzhi de ‘shengchan guocheng’ ” 从“异刻”现象看北魏后期墓志的“生产过程” [The Production Process of Epitaphs in the Later Period of Northern Wei: Centering on the Phenomenon of Deviated Engraving], *Fudan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 复旦学报 (社会科学版) (2011:2), pp. 102-13.

<sup>72</sup> Lu Yang 陸揚, “Cong muzhi de shiliao fenxi zouxiang muzhi de shixue fenxi: yi *Xinchu Wei Jin Nan Bei chao muchi shuzheng wei zhongxin*” 從墓誌的史料分析走向墓誌的史學分析——以《新出魏晉南北朝墓誌疏證》為中心 [From Textual Analyses of Tomb Inscriptions to Their Historiographical Analyses: With a Focus on the *Annotations of the Newly Discovered Tomb Inscriptions from the Periods of Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties*], *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 (2006:4), pp. 95-127, p. 117.

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of inscriptions may well reflect a self-perceived and constructed family history, and the social values accepted by them at the time. They could mirror a relatively individual and private intention of how the writer should interpret the deceased in the inscription.

### **Other sources: diplomatic documents, official and private histories, and jottings**

Many textual materials concerning the Liao period are from Liao neighbours or from later dynasties, which means they provide outsiders' views and are sometimes misleading. The thesis will include textual criticism in the discussion wherever necessary, and sources from outside or after Liao will be treated carefully, in order to assess to what extent they can be taken to reflect Liao views. Sources for the investigation of Liao constructions of dynastic identities will include tenth and eleventh century diplomatic documents exchanged between Liao and its neighbours, which mirror the Liao rhetoric employed in interstate communications. They are mainly collected in Song-Yuan and Koryŏ sources.<sup>73</sup>

Non-diplomatic Song and Yuan sources will be consulted as well – besides the *LS*, the thesis will primarily include Song historical works<sup>74</sup> and some jottings by individuals.

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<sup>73</sup> In particular, Ye Longli 葉隆禮, *Qidan guo zhi* 契丹國志 [Record of the Kitan State] (henceforth *QDGZ*) (1247; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985); Chŏng In-ji 鄭麟趾 et al., *Koryŏsa* 高麗史 [History of Koryŏ] (1451; Taebaeksan version, 1613).

<sup>74</sup> In particular, Chen Shangjun 陳尚君 (eds.), *Jiu Wudai shi xinji huizheng* 舊五代史新輯會證 [A Comprehensive Compilation of the *Old History of the Five Dynasties*] (henceforth *JWDS*) (974; Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2006), and Wang Qinruo 王欽若 et al., *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 [Grand Tortoise of the Archival Storehouse] (henceforth *CFYG*) (1013; Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2006).

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These materials may include misinterpretations of Liao identities by their authors, which may differ from what Liao sources tell us about their own identities. Because of the dominance of these sources in Sinitic historiography concerning the Liao history, as will be discussed, their interpretations have been largely inherited by later historical writings through to the present day. But they provide good examples about the ways by which some of the aspects of Liao identities had been reconstructed by the “other” and have exerted impact on later, including our present, discourses on Liao identities.

### **The multi-faceted identity of Sinitic**

An important issue concerning our sources is their recording language(s). Although the Liao elite had devised two Kitan scripts – the “large” and the “small,” only a limited number of materials written in Kitan has been discovered, and most tomb inscriptions in Kitan have not yet been deciphered. For the purpose of this thesis, the deciphered Kitan materials are helpful and will be consulted, but they are still far from sufficient. Most extant materials about the Liao dynasty, from contemporary or later, from inside Liao or its neighbours, were written in Sinitic, and this thesis will primarily discuss Sinitic materials. This raises a key question of how we should define the “identity” of Sinitic. Was it a “Han/Chinese” language, or something without considerable ethnic implications?

Historians who favour the theories of sinicisation have normally understood Sinitic as a language/script associated with the Han identity. As outlined in a former section, one assumed

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indicator for the sinicisation of the Kitan is the cultivation and interest of some Kitan elite in Sinitic. Kitan and Sinitic languages/scripts are treated as markers for two ethnic groups, and the change in preference of language is perceived to have indicated changes in their cultural and ethnic identification.

For scholars who study the “conquest dynasties,” the identity of a written language/script is understood in a similar way – Sinitic has been ethnicised and associated with the Han (elite). For instance, Tamura Jitsuzō argues that the Kitan had inherited legacies of earlier steppe empires of Turks and Uighurs, whose “national consciousness” was shaped based on sharing a common language/script, functioning against the Han/Chinese cultural influences.<sup>75</sup> Kitan and Sinitic languages were treated by him as representing two different cultures and two peoples. Kornicki’s insightful work, while underscoring the universal and cosmopolitan aspects of Sinitic in a broad East Asian historical context, also calls Sinitic “an enemy script” in his discussion of the possible reasons why the Kitan, Jurchen and Tangut had invented their local scripts.<sup>76</sup> In recent decades, this approach has been more fully demonstrated in the field of Qing studies. Scholars have placed more emphasis on the documents written in Manchu, the native language of the Qing rulers and Manchu elite rather than on those in Sinitic.<sup>77</sup>

They normally view the multilingual policies of Qing as a sign of its multiculturalism, with

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<sup>75</sup> Tamura Jitsuzō 田村実造, *Chūgoku seifuku ōchō no kenkyū* 中国征服王朝の研究 中 [Studies of the Conquest Dynasties of China, Volume 2] (Kyoto: Tōyōshi kenkyūkai, 1964), pp. 623-41.

<sup>76</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 62.

<sup>77</sup> On the importance of Manchu in studying the Qing history, see for instance, Pamela Kyle Crossley and Evelyn S. Rawski, “A Profile of the Manchu Language in Ch’ing History,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53.1 (1993), pp. 63-102; Mark C. Elliott, “The Manchu-language Archives of the Qing Dynasty and the Origins of the Palace Memorial System,” *Late Imperial China* 22.1 (2001), pp. 1-70.

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each language/script representing a distinct ethnic group. For instance, as is commonly known, during the Qianlong 乾隆 period (r. 1736-1796) the Qing court launched official cultural projects which aimed to compile dictionaries in five languages – Manchu, Sinitic, Mongolian, Tibetan and Uighur. These policies, as James A. Millward suggests, conveyed that all the five constituting parts (and peoples) possessed equal significance to the empire. Their existence was “not starkly hierarchical, but something more like parallel relationship to each other.”<sup>78</sup> The Manchus, Tibetans, Mongols and Muslims under the Qianlong reign were “represented no differently from the Han.”<sup>79</sup> The presence of the five languages is thus taken as an indicator of both the existence of five ethnic groups, and the equal treatment of them each.

Another well-known example is that during Qing many stelae were inscribed with multiple languages – Manchu, Mongolian, Sinitic, sometimes also including Tibetan and Uighur, erected for commemorative purposes. As scholars have argued, the physical presence of both the stelae and the multiple languages conveyed an appeal to legitimacy, the exploits of conquest, and cultural pluralism of the Qing Empire.<sup>80</sup> For scholars, the different languages suggest that those who came into the Qing domain did not need to understand a foreign

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<sup>78</sup> James A. Millward, *Beyond The Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 197.

<sup>79</sup> Millward, *Beyond The Pass*, pp. 201-2.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Zarrow, “The Imperial Word in Stone: Stele Inscriptions at Chengde,” in James A. Millward and Ruth W. Dunnell (eds.), *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde* (Abingdon: Routledge Curzon, 2004), pp. 147-63; Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 237, 429.

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language,<sup>81</sup> presenting the hospitality of the Qing for the visiting Mongols, Tibetans and Muslims.<sup>82</sup> Each language thus had its targeted people and functioned as a representation of the people. As Rawski has argued, the Qing court attempted to “preserve the cultural boundaries separating these five peoples,”<sup>83</sup> and for her the five languages symbolise five respective ethnic groups, “officially enshrined as the languages of the empire.”<sup>84</sup> The so-called conquest dynasties preceding Qing and their scripts and multilingual policies have been analysed in a similar spirit. What Rawski terms as “national scripts” of Kitan, Jurchen, Tangut and Mongol, were seen as a sign of anti-sinicisation by the leading non-Han groups of the Liao, Jin, Xi Xia, and Yuan.<sup>85</sup> As we can observe, in the scholarship represented by aforementioned works, each language is ethnicised as a language of a particular ethnic group, and treated as one of, though not the only, crucial markers of ethnic identity. Sinitic thus represented one of the constituting ethnic groups of the Qing Empire – the Han.

While it might be true that the five scripts/languages in some contexts had their targets and represent the perceived five different peoples during the Qing period, problems arise if we always think about the identity of languages through ethnic discourse and unquestioningly assume that before Qing there must have been the same principle applied to all other northern non-Han dynasties. As will be discussed, during the Liao period, Sinitic had several different facets and was not exclusively a cultural/ethnic marker for the Han. Although in origin not

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<sup>81</sup> Zarrow, “The Imperial Word in Stone: Stele Inscriptions at Chengde,” p. 146.

<sup>82</sup> Zarrow, “The Imperial Word in Stone: Stele Inscriptions at Chengde,” p. 155.

<sup>83</sup> Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing,” p.835.

<sup>84</sup> Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing,” p. 835.

<sup>85</sup> Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing,” p. 837.

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the “native” written language of the Kitan, Sinitic cannot be simply taken as a “foreign” or “alien” language for the Kitan or for other perceived non-Han groups. As we shall see, it at least possesses several of the following facets: the source for inventing the Kitan scripts, a universal language used by many elites of Eastern Eurasian countries, an elite language which marked their ruling status, a carrier of “knowledge” of Confucianist, Buddhist, and Daoist doctrines, sacred symbols which represented esoteric knowledge, a possible secure language, and an indicator of a cultural component of the empire.<sup>86</sup>

### *Sinitic as a source for the Kitan scripts*

Knowledge about the Kitan language is still very limited, but scholars have agreed that linguistically it belongs to the “Altaic” languages (despite the problematic definition), and some vocabulary was cognate with Mongolian.<sup>87</sup> The two scripts were created to record Kitan by Liao experts during the reign of the first Liao emperor Abaoji, with the large script invented in 920 and the small script several years later with no recorded exact date.<sup>88</sup> The large script was derived from Sinitic characters and modelled on their structure, mixed with logographs and phonograms but seems to have “more logographs” than the small script.<sup>89</sup> Some were directly borrowed from Sinitic with the same characters, meanings, and possibly

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<sup>86</sup> In his book Kornicki also has some similar conclusions drawn from studies primarily concerning cases in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (some others, including Liao, have also been briefly examined). I have reached my observations independently based on my research on the Liao history, and will discuss Kornicki’s arguments wherever relevant.

<sup>87</sup> Kane, *The Kitan Language and Script*, p. ix.

<sup>88</sup> Kane, *The Kitan Language and Script*, p. 3; Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>89</sup> Kane, *The Kitan Language and Script*, p. 3; Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 8-9.



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pronunciations such as the words for emperor and empress dowager. Some were identical with Sinitic in some of the above aspects but different in others. There are also many other Kitan graphs which were structurally completely different from any Sinitic characters.<sup>90</sup>

The small script was invented after encounters with Uighur emissaries. It follows the principles of the Uighur script and primarily syllabic.<sup>91</sup> In its form, it was invented based on the large script and Sinitic characters, sharing the square appearance.<sup>92</sup> In contrast to the large script, the deciphered graphs of the small script which appear identical with Sinitic share no meanings or pronunciations with them.<sup>93</sup> As Liu Fengzhu has suggested, the move from Sinitic to the large script, and finally to the small script, indicates the development of the Kitan script towards a method more suitable for recording their own language.<sup>94</sup>

Compared with the small script, the large one seems to be less “convenient,” but as the script nominally invented under the name of Abaoji it was not abolished and still used for writing various Kitan documents or translating materials written in other languages.<sup>95</sup> Both the two Kitan scripts and Sinitic were used throughout the Liao period as the main written languages.<sup>96</sup>

As we can see, though linguistically Kitan was distinct from Sinitic, Sinitic script had played

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<sup>90</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>91</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 4, 9.

<sup>92</sup> Kane, *The Kitan Language and Script*, p. 3; Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 4, 9.

<sup>93</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 9.

<sup>95</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>96</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 4.

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an indispensable part in the creation of the two Kitan scripts. Although the Liao elite had encountered the Uighurs and were inspired to devise the small script, it in appearance remained a variation of the large script and Sinitic script, and it did not use Uighur script to replace the square form derived from Sinitic script. In this aspect, the Kitan scripts are comparable to many other scripts in East Asian history inspired primarily by Sinitic, such as those invented by the Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Jurchens and Tanguts. As Kornicki has pointed out, although the Sinitic was different from other “cosmopolitan languages” such as Latin because it was not a spoken language, it however did “create a script community, instead of a speech community, one that covered most of East Asia up to the twentieth century and that remained stable and uniform for centuries.”<sup>97</sup>

### *Sinitic as a universal written language*

As with some other aforementioned Sinic elements borrowed by the Kitan, Sinitic could not be seen as a language whose ownership was perceived by the Kitan as exclusively belonging to the Han. In the early tenth century when Abaoji founded the Liao regime and throughout the course of the Liao dynasty, what the Liao elite faced was *not* one single regime whose elite “monopolised” Sinitic and other Sinic elements, but multiple neighbours whose ruling strata had long treated Sinitic as their own written language to mark elite status. Liao had indeed conquered regimes whose elite had employed Sinitic, such as the Later Jin and Bohai. But Sinitic was not one language for one “Chinese nation.” Rather, the regimes subjugated by Liao simply happened to have elite who wrote in Sinitic, which means the language was

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<sup>97</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 38.

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unlikely to be politicised and ethnicised as a language of a subject (Han/Chinese) group only.

My argument is also well supported by Kornicki's broader studies on East Asian cases especially those of Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. As he has pointed out, "Sinitic was not perceived as a foreign language that 'belonged' to China, but rather was regarded as part of the patrimony of 'all under heaven'."<sup>98</sup> Sinitic in these societies did not undermine local cultural identities and was not understood as a foreign element, but rather as a form of "universal writing" which "facilitated record-keeping, taxation, state myth-making, and much else."<sup>99</sup> Its ownership "was not so clearcut in pre-modern East Asia," but was simply "appropriated by neighbouring societies for their own use, thus attenuating its character as a cosmopolitan language of external origins."<sup>100</sup> In the case of Korea as shown by Kornicki, Sinitic was regarded by the Korean elite as universally and hierarchically the "writings of the ancient sages" rather than that of Han/Chinese only.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, texts written in Sinitic should be understood in a similar way, in which Sinitic materials "may have their origins in the lands that constitute China today, but they are neither linguistically nor culturally exclusively 'Chinese'."<sup>102</sup> Besides its facet in many societies as a common written language for the local elite, in interstate context Sinitic played a similar role in diplomatic communications.<sup>103</sup> It could thus be taken as one (written) form of *lingua franca* for many

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<sup>98</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 301.

<sup>99</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 40.

<sup>100</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 41.

<sup>101</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 18.

<sup>102</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 18.

<sup>103</sup> Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, "Introduction," in Franke and Twitchett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 6, pp. 1-42, p. 20.

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Eastern Eurasian states and elites, similar to the status of Latin in medieval Europe and Arabic in the Islamic world.<sup>104</sup>

*Sinitic as an elite language and a source of knowledge*

The aforementioned universal aspect of Sinitic in fact primarily makes sense when talking about the educated elite circle. As Mary W. Helms puts it, literacy was important because it “legitimated authority and underwritten expressions of power,” and the scripts/texts themselves and the capacity of understanding them symbolised divine skills and the ability to unfold “esoteric knowledge.”<sup>105</sup> As for our present study, the mastery of Sinitic and the access to its knowledge were normally limited to a small elite group within the Liao state, and the language/script functioned as a symbol of their elite status and legitimacy.

Sinitic was used by the elite stratum of many Eastern Eurasian regimes when it came to diplomatic communications and at home. Kornicki’s example of Vietnam is interesting and persuasive: while a poet in eleventh-century Vietnam expressed the stance supporting his country fighting against Northern Song military forces, he wrote this poem in Sinitic with no sense of inappropriateness or conflict between his native elite identity and his use of Sinitic. As Kornicki puts it, Sinitic “had already been appropriated as the literary language of all

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<sup>104</sup> Of course, as aforementioned there are distinctions between Sinitic and Latin. See Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, pp. 1, 19.

<sup>105</sup> Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses’ Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 12-13.

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educated Vietnamese.”<sup>106</sup>

As in other Eastern Eurasian states, Sinitic was also a common written language for the Liao elite at home, bridging the elite from diverse cultural backgrounds. For many within the Liao ruling elite including the Kitan, Sinitic was no less important than the Kitan language. For instance, as part of the sacred ritual, many elite from Liao imperial and consort clans and from other Kitan aristocratic families had tomb inscriptions written in Sinitic or in both Sinitic and a Kitan script, which recorded their deeds and words and were buried together with them underground. Religious works and doctrines such as those of Buddhism and Confucianism were also dominantly written in Sinitic rather than in Kitan, which played an indispensable role in the life of Liao intellectuals.<sup>107</sup>

In addition, while few have survived, many works in the fields of law, medicine, and history written in Sinitic were translated into Kitan,<sup>108</sup> thus enhancing the knowledge base of the Liao elite. In this sense, in the Liao regime Sinitic was a vehicle for knowledge and Sinitic texts were a source of knowledge. Again, it was not a written language employed and perceived by the Kitan as one belonging to any particular ethnic group, but just as Kornicki argues for Japan, Korea and Vietnam, it had been “mastered and naturalized as the medium for Buddhist, philosophical, medical, and other domains of writing, extending even to (male) diaries and correspondence” and the mastery of which was “essential for intellectual writing

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<sup>106</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, pp. 3, 18.

<sup>107</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 61.

<sup>108</sup> Franke and Twitchett, “Introduction,” p. 33.

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and for government service.”<sup>109</sup>

### *Sinitic as sacred symbols*

In addition to the aforementioned dimensions, in the Liao historical context Sinitic could represent sacred symbols, which was also related to its facet as an elite language. From outsiders’ perspective, Sinitic was indeed not a native written language for many Liao elite, but regardless of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, for the Liao elite this “foreignness” can be explored and manipulated. Besides its universal dimension, Sinitic could be constructed and perceived as native, original, or inborn to the Liao elite circle to justify their ruling status, and was not necessarily understood as a foreign thing in Liao discourse. This is because things with foreign origins, as discussed insightfully by some scholars, can function as representatives of the unknown, or “esoteric knowledge,” the monopoly of which distanced the elite stratum from the masses and legitimised their governance.<sup>110</sup> In the Liao context, Sinitic was a foreign language not in the sense of its ownership, but in its facet as an object with external origins, the sacredness of which could only be unfolded by those of “divine” power – the Liao ruling elite. As will be discussed in Chapter III, the Liao ruling clans and many elite in fact constructed themselves as “foreigners” in origins as well. Sinitic was thus merely “foreign” to the less educated natives, but was “native” to many Liao ruling members.

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<sup>109</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 47.

<sup>110</sup> Helms, *Ulysses’ Sail*; Marshall Sahlins, “The Stranger-King or, Elementary Form of the Politics of Life,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 36 (2008), pp. 177-99.

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Jesse D. Sloane has discussed a case in which a nomadic tribe – Tieli from north of Liao, had requested and then received classics canonised by Confucianism from the Liao court in 1012.<sup>111</sup> He points out that this event demonstrates a diplomatic protocol in Inner Asia of circulating (Confucian) classical texts, regardless of whether the texts were to be studied, to be used to consolidating local leadership, or for “apotropaic” purposes.<sup>112</sup> But I will emphasise the perception of these texts written in Sinitic as objects of prestige and sacredness even among the so-called non-Han groups of Kitan and Tieli. The event, if there is truth to it, underscores the role of the texts not as “Han/Chinese” but as divine materials. It is highly doubtful that the Tieli chieftains from the northern borders of Liao, implying they might be even less influenced by Sinitic than the Kitan, would really read or cultivate themselves in the language or Confucian principles. But as Helms has pointed out, the sacred writings were “particularly appreciated by chiefs or foreign tribes where literacy was not a native art.”<sup>113</sup> The request of the texts in Sinitic indicates that they must have been in one or more ways useful to the chieftains and contributed to their political and social status. If these northern nomads did not commit themselves to what the texts actually said and taught, the treatment of the Sinitic texts as sacred foreign objects with divine power, and/or as symbol of the chieftains’ local leadership conferred directly by their powerful suzerain (Liao), might be the only major initiatives for the request.

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<sup>111</sup> Sloane, “Contending States,” p.117.

<sup>112</sup> Sloane, “Contending States,” p. 117.

<sup>113</sup> Helms, *Ulysses’ Sail*, p. 12.

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On the other hand, the very reason that these texts were requested and conferred was that they were seen as sacred objects which represented the Liao preeminent status in the contemporary interstate hierarchy as an authority in religion/doctrine and knowledge. The Sinitic texts themselves, and the very actions to request and to confer these texts, were thus integral to and could express and further reinforce the image of Liao as the leading power in the eleventh-century multistate system.

This facet of Sinitic as sacred symbols may also help to partly explain the legitimization of the Liao domination in Central Asia after it was toppled by the Jin forces. As Biran has shown, the Western Liao court retained many what she problematically terms as “Chinese features” such as imperial designations and official titles.<sup>114</sup> Since Liao subjects with a Han origin/background were few in number in the Western Liao domain, the retaining of Sinitic elements was not aimed to please the Han population, but to legitimise the Liao court in the new land.<sup>115</sup> Regardless of how these elements were defined and called, they played a crucial role in the political and cultural legitimacy of the westward relocated Liao Empire when dominating the local Muslim population.<sup>116</sup> As Biran points out, before the Western Liao period, “in the Islamic world as a whole, China was conceived as a vast, populous, remote and mysterious country on the eastern fringes of the world.”<sup>117</sup> It enjoyed a great prestige because of its perceived tolerant and just religious policies, skilled craftsman, developed

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<sup>114</sup> Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>115</sup> Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>116</sup> Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, p. 96.

<sup>117</sup> Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, p. 97.



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civilisation, and distinctive commercial goods, etc., and had been seen as the master of Central Asia even long after the actual retreat of the Tang force in 751.<sup>118</sup>

Then the Liao court not only relocated to an area where “China” had enjoyed great fame<sup>119</sup> but also in local views it ruled in an image of “China” because of its similar tolerance of local beliefs and its retaining of many features with Sinic origins.<sup>120</sup> As Biran has advanced, the China-Liao features provided the Western Liao court with “a separate and cohesive identity that won them prestige among their multi-ethnic and multi-religious subjects.”<sup>121</sup> As one of the many Sinic elements, “the peculiarity of the Chinese script was recognized by the Muslims,”<sup>122</sup> and the language appeared constantly within the Western Liao domain such as in the coins.<sup>123</sup> In this case, Sinitic was thus one of the many perceived sacred elements from a mysterious eastern land, which contributed to the image and identity of Western Liao as a Sinic empire which was known only vaguely but had long enjoyed great fame in the Islamic world. This example in fact also supports the aforementioned anthropological framework, in which the elements perceived by the locals to possess foreign origins were useful tools for the legitimization of the ruling elite. Again, Sinitic and many other Sinic elements in this context were not something understood through a division between Han and non-Han, or between Kitan, Han and Turks in ethnic terms, or between Muslims and pagans in religious sense, but

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<sup>118</sup> Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, pp. 97-101.

<sup>119</sup> Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, p. 100.

<sup>120</sup> Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, pp. 95, 101-2.

<sup>121</sup> Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, p. 198.

<sup>122</sup> Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, p. 97.

<sup>123</sup> Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, p. 93.

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in nature mirrored a cosmological and a political binary between the native and foreign in terms of origins, and between the rulers and the ruled in terms of hierarchy.

*Sinitic as a possible language of security*

For some “conquest dynasties,” the native languages were, and are regarded by historians, as a safe language known primarily to the conquest elite circle. For instance, the Manchu language was preferred in palace memorial system, in which emperors and close officials communicated “sensitive information” which as Elliot points out “was of particular importance to the Manchus, who, as alien rulers, were somewhat obsessed with matters of security.”<sup>124</sup> In addition, Manchu’s role as a safe language for the conquest elite also featured “documents relating to the imperial lineage, banner affairs, and Inner Asian military matters.”<sup>125</sup> The native scripts of Kitan, Tangut, and Jurchen were also understood in a similar way: they might serve as a secure language, and one of Sinitic’s possible facets was a written language of an enemy.<sup>126</sup>

However, we have to recognise that whether a language could be a “safe” language for an elite group depended on where the potential threat came from and not entirely on ethnicity. While in certain contexts Sinitic may have been the symbol of an alien (Han) group for the conquest elite, the native language could also be a dangerous one in both its spoken and

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<sup>124</sup> Elliott, “The Manchu-language Archives of the Qing Dynasty,” p. 47.

<sup>125</sup> Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, pp. 36-37; Also see Crossley and Rawski, “A Profile of the Manchu Language,” pp. 70-75.

<sup>126</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 62.

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written forms if the challenges to the throne were internal. Then it was the very native language that was not secure. In such a case, elements with foreign origins would be a safer choice. In fact, we have many historical cases in which foreigners or foreign things in general may have been regarded as crucial means for maintaining security. As commonly known, the medieval Mamluks with Turkish or Mongolian origins were preferred by caliphs over many local military forces, because of the former's lack of local roots and thus the perceived relatively higher loyalty to the throne than the latter, whose allegiance largely remained in hands of local strongmen. The Xuanzong 玄宗 Emperor (r. 712-756) of Tang had appointed generals with non-Han origins as military governors of key frontier prefectures due to similar reasons. In the thirteenth century, the future Kubilai Khan also relied heavily on officials with Han background to build up his power base in north China to survive the actual and potential competition with other Mongol aristocrats. Thus to recruit people from a different group from oneself could sometimes prove advantageous.

We have little information about the situation of Sinitic in the Liao dynasty, but Kitan seems to have played a less important role as a secure language. As some scholars have pointed out, it is problematic to define Liao as a "conquest dynasty." In general, not only the Liao elite lacked the impetus and desire to conquer Sinic regions, but also the major area with the so-called Han population was "given" to Liao by Later Jin as the price for Liao military assistance in 938.<sup>127</sup> The population labelled as Han had posed relatively little threat to the

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<sup>127</sup> See, in particular, Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, pp. 6-9; Standen, "What nomads want." Peter Allan Lorge has also shown that Liao had limited intention of conquest. See his discussion in "War and the Creation of the Northern Song State" (University of Pennsylvania Ph.D. diss., 1996); and *The Reunification*

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Liao ruling stratum compared to Jin, Yuan, Qing, and other Sinic dynasties. On the contrary, it was the Kitan elite who had consistently challenged the throne throughout the Liao period.<sup>128</sup>

Sinitic in certain periods of crisis caused by the Kitan elite thus may have functioned as a secure language for the imperial rulers. For instance, during the period of the transformation of the Kitan society from a tribal organisation to an empire in the late ninth and the early tenth century, the threat to Abaoji's power was neither from Han subjects nor from southern neighbours, but from inside Kitan society.<sup>129</sup> The centralisation of power by Abaoji such as his dismissal of the triennial election of Qaghan which had been traditional to the Kitan rulership met with resistance from Kitan aristocrats.<sup>130</sup> Compared with other internal contenders, an important source and advantage of Abaoji's power was his possession of cities with populations from former Tang districts and elites with Han origin who came as captives or refugees, who provided him with economic, military, and intellectual backup.<sup>131</sup> Although we lack direct evidence, the local spoken tongue of northern China part of which was under Liao domination at the time, and Sinitic in its written form, might well have been an

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*of China: Peace through War under the Song Dynasty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>128</sup> See for instance, the section on rebellions caused by forces with various backgrounds, in Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*, pp. 398-409.

<sup>129</sup> Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," pp. 61-62.

<sup>130</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*, pp. 398-400; Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," pp. 60-62.

<sup>131</sup> On the role played by the elite with Han origin in Liao, see for instance, Jiang Jinling 蒋金玲, "Liaodai Hanzu shiren yanjiu" 辽代汉族士人研究 [On the Han elite during the Liao dynasty], (Jilin University Ph.D. diss., 2010).

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important means of communication between Abaoji and his Han supporters against opposing Kitan forces.<sup>132</sup> It should have been a more secure choice than Kitan especially during the period of Kitan internal political crises, as were his supporters with foreign origins over ambitious native Kitan aristocrats. What mattered was politics, rather than ethnicity.

### *Sinitic as a symbol of a composing culture*

Besides the aforementioned aspects, Sinitic functioned similarly (but not identically) to the Qing examples discussed earlier, indicating one of the cultural compositions of the Liao Empire. For instance, according to the accounts of *LS*, in 924 Abaoji ordered an inscription on a stele from earlier Uighur period to be rubbed down and inscribed with Kitan, Sinitic and Turkic languages to record the Liao achievement of conquest in the steppe.<sup>133</sup> Although this stele remains to be found, if the account resembles some reality, then in this case the Liao stele was similar to the aforementioned Qing multilingual steles and dictionaries. The three languages on this Liao stele physically demonstrated to any audience the composing cultural parts of the Liao Empire at the time – the Kitan, Turkic and Han cultures. But still in this case Sinitic functions more as a cultural rather than ethnic indicator – the elite who wrote in Sinitic were not limited to those labelled as Han but also included elite of Bohai, Koryŏ and Turks, or Kitan who cultivated Sinitic literacy.

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<sup>132</sup> According to the *JWDS* Abaoji could speak “Han language,” which should be a tongue spoken by the Han in the northern frontier regions. 11:137.4282.

<sup>133</sup> *LS*, 1:2.20. 詔礪辟遏可汗故碑，以契丹、突厥、漢字紀其功。

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### *Sinitic as a choice*

The above discussion has highlighted the multi-faceted identity of Sinitic, and thus to ethnicise it as a language exclusively owned by Han is a misinterpretation. As Kornicki has pointed out, the usage of Sinitic which played a dominant role in writings of neighbouring societies of Sinic empires was not an imposition by Sinic regimes but rather a deliberate choice,<sup>134</sup> and the relationship between Sinitic and local scripts inspired by Sinitic was not dichotomised.<sup>135</sup> In our Liao case, neither is the assumption that materials written in Kitan must have been more valuable and important than those in Sinitic adequate to explain the Liao elites' employment of Sinitic, nor is the idea that using Sinitic was a sign of sinicisation. I argue that Sinitic universally and hierarchically defined an elite class and their elite culture in the Eastern Eurasian world, and was perceived as connecting or uniting the elite of different backgrounds within the Liao Empire. It more broadly marked their distinguished identity within the known world from the commoners, rather than sharpening and differentiating between their identities as Kitan, Han, or Bohai. The use of Sinitic thus indicates a community of a universal elite stratum which, though divided by regimes, was not divided by ill-defined ethnic groups.

The Sinitic at the time can be understood as somewhat similar to English in the present day. In extreme cases English might be racialised or ethnicised as an exclusive symbol of power of one race, and in many cases it might have competitive relationships with other languages in

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<sup>134</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 39.

<sup>135</sup> See Kornicki's discussion in *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, esp. Chapter 2.

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multicultural contexts and communities. But for many English learners and speakers today, or in cases which do not involve much tension between cultures and human groups, English is unlikely to be always understood by speakers as associated with white British or American in a racial discourse. For instance, we can see the popularity of English in Chinese education, the role of English as the main language in computer sciences, and English written in signs at airports and train stations of many non-Anglophone countries as guidance for travellers from all around world. It can simply be a language essential for acquiring more knowledge of different disciplines, for knowing more about a wider world, and for intelligible communication when travelling abroad. Of course, it does not mean that the expansion of English language in history and present-day has not been accompanied by hegemonic powers in culture, commerce or military, but for its learners and speakers the role and identity of English itself is certainly not always perceived and dealt with in ways which evoke ethnic or racial thinking.

As will be outlined in the next section, the context within which the Liao dynasty rose to power may have contributed to shaping the multiple identities of many Sinic elements (including Sinitic) during the Liao period. In comparison with the history of the later Mongols and Manchu, the Liao dynasty was born in a world where Sinitic was a dominant language. During the time of the rise of Mongols and Manchu, the “knowledge” they had encountered and the major sources for their dynastic legitimation were much more diverse and might have been written in different languages – Mongolian, Sinitic, Tibetan or those based on Arabic script. But for the Liao regime, although never isolated from other

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possibilities such as Uighur cultures, the world it faced was one in which the employment of Tang and earlier Sinic traditions primarily transmitted in Sinitic was the “fashion,” with little obvious competition.<sup>136</sup>

## **5. The political and social context of the rises of Liao**

We have discussed the many facets of Sinitic, but why was it able to play multiple roles in the Liao dynasty? For instance, we have shown that Sinitic was the source for inventing the two Kitan scripts despite considerable linguistic differences between the two. But why was the script of the apparently more linguistically similar Uighur language not used to replace the Sinitic script?

Kornicki has discussed a related but different question of why some societies invented local scripts rather than to continue using Sinitic.<sup>137</sup> He has proposed that the reasons were always political, cultural or linguistic, and for the Kitan, Tangut and Jurchen, he suggests that the determination of rejecting Sinitic characters and the possession of new local scripts reflects “a cultural confidence.”<sup>138</sup> His argument is reasonable for his study but he also acknowledges that the above scripts were primarily modelled on Sinitic script.<sup>139</sup> Then for this study there is another important question unanswered if we locate these new local scripts in a wider

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<sup>136</sup> Di Cosmo, “Review of *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 6*,” pp. 502-4.

<sup>137</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, pp. 60, 62.

<sup>138</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 62.

<sup>139</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 62.



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historical context than Kornicki's. This predominance of Sinitic in inspiring the Kitan and other scripts was clearly not the case for all scripts including the Mongolian script, which was inspired by and modelled on the Uighur script and which in turn went on to inspire the Manchu script. The question is why then for the neighbours of Sinic regimes was Sinitic sometimes a source for local scripts (e.g. Liao and Jin) and sometimes not (e.g. Mongols and Manchus)? It is certainly not an issue of the centripetal power of Sinitic, because not all neighbouring states invented their scripts based on it. It was neither the assumed eternal antagonism between Han and nomads, because as mentioned above, Kitan, Tangut and Jurchen certainly favoured Sinitic over others as a source for inventing their native scripts.

I argue that the political and social context since the mid-ninth century had been shaping the Kitan perceptions of many elements with Sinic origins, which should not be understood simply via a dichotomy between Han and non-Han. Though not directly answering our question, Kornicki has discussed why there was a delay in inventing local scripts when translating Buddhist texts in Vietnam, Japan and Korea in comparison with other powers such as Tibet.<sup>140</sup> As he points out, Sinitic coexisted with and was challenged by other scripts in East Asia such as Tibetan, Mongolian and Manchu scripts.<sup>141</sup> While in Vietnam, Japan and Korea besides the Sinitic other scripts were unfamiliar to local elite, elite of other neighbouring societies of Sinic empires (e.g. Uighurs, Tibetans, Mongols, and Manchus) had alternatives from their neighbours. Therefore, for the elite in societies such as Japan they “were surely unable to relativize the Chinese script and thus to conceive of it as one option

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<sup>140</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>141</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 17.

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rather than the only option.”<sup>142</sup> Sinitic, when introduced to their societies, “did not constitute so much the introduction of the idea of writing itself...but rather the practice of writing Sinitic,” and “was thus normative at first, and it was only later that ‘writing’ was conceptualised as a tool that could be used to record other languages, including their own vernaculars.”<sup>143</sup>

What concerns this study is not much the difference between a regime with alternatives and one with little choice, but why a regime chose one rather than another from multiple choices. As mentioned, in contrast to Japan and Korea which had long had difficulty relativising Sinitic, the Mongols (and then Manchus) had other available options and chose to invent scripts modelled on Uighur script which was linguistically more suitable for theirs compared with Sinitic. However, it was also true that the Kitan and some others such as the Tangut clearly chose to model their scripts on the Sinitic script while they had better alternatives from linguistically similar languages such as Uighur and Tibetan. Therefore for our Kitan case (and also for the Tangut and Jurchen) it was not an issue of whether they had better alternatives, but of why they preferred Sinitic over others even where there was an available better choice? The following section will outline the greatly changed political and cultural landscape in Eastern Eurasia from the 840s, which may help to explain not only why Sinitic could play a multi-faceted role and was preferred by the Kitan to invent their script, but also why like the Sinitic language many other Sinic elements were also understood as multi-faceted common legacies rather than exclusively belonging to the Han.

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<sup>142</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>143</sup> Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 46.

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## **Fragmented Eastern Eurasia, 850-950**

The ninth century witnessed great geopolitical changes in Eastern Eurasia. Since around 840s CE, internal crises, natural catastrophes, or combination of such factors shook the political stability of the dominant powers. The once unified Tibetan Empire declined and sank into political fragmentation. This was then followed by the collapse of the Uighur Qaghanate on the Mongolian plateaus. Within the Tang Empire, social riots had become severe and from 858 a series of large scale revolts broke out, culminating in the great rebellions led by Huang Chao 黃巢 (820-884) beginning in 878. Since then, as Herbert Franke describes, “toward the end of the century came a collapse of central authority that spread through East Asia like an epidemic.”<sup>144</sup> Heian 平安 Japan (794-1192), the Silla 新羅 (57 BCE-935) regime in the Korean peninsula, Bohai in present-day northeast China, and the Kingdom of Nanzhao 南詔 (738-902) based in China’s Yunnan 雲南 Province, all fell into social and political instability.<sup>145</sup>

### ***The fall of the Uighur Qaghanate***

What is relevant to this thesis is the changing political-cultural landscape in the northern part of the continent, the fall of the Uighur and Tang empires in particular, which had great impact on the rise of Kitan and the creation of the Liao Empire and so must be sketched here. Since

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<sup>144</sup> Franke and Twitchett, “Introduction,” p. 5.

<sup>145</sup> For a general narrative on the political landscape from the 840s, see Franke and Twitchett, “Introduction,” p. 5.

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its establishment in 744, the Uighur regime was a dominant power in the Eastern Eurasian steppe for the next one hundred years.<sup>146</sup> Compared with their steppe predecessors, the Uighurs had maintained a more peaceful and amicable relationship with Tang, and played a special role among Tang's foreign neighbours largely because of the crucial military assistance they had provided to Tang during the devastating rebellion initiated by An Lushan 安祿山 (703-757) in the mid-eighth century.<sup>147</sup>

However, combined forces eventually destroyed the once powerful qaghanate during the first half of the ninth century. Signs of decline of the Uighur power already appeared around the last decade of the eighth century, as the result of a factional crisis and a military defeat by the Tibetans.<sup>148</sup> This weakness seems to have been exploited, though unsuccessfully, by the Kirghiz, who had been Uighurs' subject tribal group based in the upper Yenisei River valley.<sup>149</sup> However, in about 820 the Kirghiz ruler had eventually asserted his independent authority, followed by severe military confrontations between the two powers which lasted for around two decades.<sup>150</sup> What worsened the situation was the internal chaos of the Uighurs. The ruling stratum was troubled by court factionalism and succession crises during the 830s, and in the winter leading to 840 natural calamities and accompanying effects caused

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<sup>146</sup> On the Uighur Empire, see for instance, Colin Mackerras, *The Uighur Empire According to the T'ang Dynastic Histories: A Study in Sino-Uighur Relations, 744-840* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973).

<sup>147</sup> Michael R. Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire: A Documentary History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 22.

<sup>148</sup> Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, p. 30, note 59.

<sup>149</sup> Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>150</sup> Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, pp. 36-37.

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great loss in livestock and a massive death toll.<sup>151</sup> Such internal crises invited the intervention of the Kirghizin in 840, who undertook a destructive invasion of the Uighurs and toppled their one-hundred-year domination of the steppe.<sup>152</sup>

The Kirghiz invasion and the collapse of the Uighur Qaghanate caused a large scale migration of the remaining population of Uighurs. Some of them migrated westwards to areas of present-day Gansu and Xinjiang of China and Central Asia,<sup>153</sup> and others fled southward to Tang frontiers where they were annihilated by Tang generals.<sup>154</sup> After the political catastrophe on the Mongolian plateau, as Michael R. Drompp has pointed out, “[t]he Uighur heartland then entered into a dark period about which little is known until its reemergence to the light of history early in the thirteenth century with the rise of Chinggis Qan.”<sup>155</sup>

The collapse of the Uighur Qaghanate marked a significant change in the political landscape of Eastern Eurasia. The fall of the empire and the massive migration left a power vacuum on the Mongolian plateau.<sup>156</sup> Some much lesser and fragmented tribal powers remained, but compared with the preceding centuries no great power could effectively rebuild an empire imposing its order on the steppe.<sup>157</sup> As Drompp has shown, the Kirgiz did not replace the

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<sup>151</sup> Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, pp. 33-35, 37.

<sup>152</sup> Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, p. 37.

<sup>153</sup> Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, pp. 197-200.

<sup>154</sup> See the discussion in Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, esp. pp. 95-123.

<sup>155</sup> Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, p. 38.

<sup>156</sup> Twitchett and Tietze, “The Liao,” p. 53.

<sup>157</sup> Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, pp. 201, 203; Also see Michael R. Drompp, “Breaking the Orkhon Tradition: Kirghiz Adherence to the Yenisei Region after A. D. 840,” *Journal of the American*

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Uighurs as a new dominant force on the Mongolian plateau. They soon returned to where they were originally from (upper Yenisei River valley) due to various ecological, geographical and economic reasons.<sup>158</sup> It was only after the thirteenth century that the Mongols once again turned the region into a centre of a great power.<sup>159</sup>

The vanishing of a powerful steppe empire centred on the Orkhon River valley proved significant to the cultural orientation of Uighurs' previous subject group – the Kitan, including their understanding of many cultural elements with Sinic origin. There is no doubt that the Uighurs had exerted a great influence on the Kitan, and cultures with Turkic origins remained influential to the Kitan. For instance, the Kitan small script was modelled on Uighur letters; Uighur communities and merchants also possessed an indispensable role in Liao social and economic activity. And the Xiao clan, which was consort to the Liao imperial family, appears to have had Uighur descent.<sup>160</sup> But differently from the centuries leading up to the 840s, since the middle of the ninth century no powerful steppe powers had maintained political, military and cultural strength from the Orkhon River valley and sustained suzerainty over the Kitan. In 842, the Kitan had shifted their allegiance from their extinguished former master to Tang. This meant more than just political allegiance, as compared with some steppe cultural traditions, several cultural elements with Sinic origins so far predominantly featured in the Tang Empire, became increasingly attractive to the Kitan.

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*Oriental Society* 119.3 (1999), pp. 390-403.

<sup>158</sup> Drompp, "Breaking the Orkhon Tradition," pp. 400-3.

<sup>159</sup> Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, p. 201.

<sup>160</sup> Drompp, *The Collapse of the Uighur Empire*, pp. 201-2.

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One example was a system of imperial designations, as will be discussed in the next chapter. In Eastern Eurasia, the downfall of the Uighur Qaghanate, depopulation of the steppe region, and fragmented lesser remaining groups made steppe imperial designations such as the title and position of qaghan cease to possess attraction to many societies with nomadic origins as strong as in preceding centuries. In contrast, south of the Kitan, while the Tang Empire had broken into multiple regional forces, the emergence of these many new powers who largely inherited the Tang legacies contributed to the popularity and longevity of the Tang model of governance, and promoted the vitality of the imperial culture with Sinic origins. Strong warlords competed for imperial positions or negotiated for diplomatic parity, and those with lesser power accepted their status as king (*guowang* 國王), prince (*wang* 王), etc., most of which were inherited from Tang imperial traditions and/or with modifications. As will be discussed in the following chapters, a similar phenomenon also took place with regard to other cultural elements with Sinic origins, including those concerning constructed genealogies and imagined geographical location.

### ***The collapse of the Tang Empire and the post-Tang multi-state world***

To the south of the Uighurs, the Tang Empire was also troubled by internal unease. The reign of Wenzong 文宗 (r. 827-840) had already witnessed increasing social instability marked by riots and bandits.<sup>161</sup> Larger scale revolts occurred during the 860s, and from 875

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<sup>161</sup> Robert M. Somers, "The End of the T'ang," in Denis Twitchett(ed.), *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 3, Part I, Sui and T'ang China, 589-906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 682-789,

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empire-wide rebellions broke out.<sup>162</sup> In 878, a rebellion led by Huang Chao, which lasted until 884, marked the culmination of a series of political disasters, which eventually destroyed the central authority of the Tang government, leaving the empire a dead man walking.<sup>163</sup>

During decades of social and political instability, especially during the Huang Chao rebellion, the increasing incompetence of central government to cope with these crises and to maintain social and political order facilitated further regional militarisation.<sup>164</sup> Local powers replaced the absent central authority, marshalling local support and undertaking the responsibility of securing regional order.<sup>165</sup> During the Huang Chao rebellion in particular, which entirely invalidated the Tang central authority, multiple regional military strongmen amassed great personal power, by virtue of which they not only accelerated the end of the rebellion but also became the *de facto* local rulers. During and after the rebellion, these regional leaders competed fiercely with one another over the control of natural resources, lands, and population, and struggled to impose control over the puppet emperor to increase their personal influence.<sup>166</sup> In 907, one warlord Zhu Wen 朱溫 (r. 907-912), who first served Huang Chao during the rebellion but then fought against him in the name of the Tang court, replaced the last child emperor and established Later Liang 後梁 (907-923). The event

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<sup>162</sup> Somers, "The End of the T'ang," pp. 686-700; 720-36.

<sup>163</sup> On the Huang Chao rebellion, see Somers, "The End of the T'ang," pp. 736-62. Also see Tackett, *Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*, pp. 187-234.

<sup>164</sup> Somers, "The End of the T'ang," pp. 729, 750-54.

<sup>165</sup> Somers, "The End of the T'ang," pp. 750-54.

<sup>166</sup> Somers, "The End of the T'ang," pp. 750-81.



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marked the formal historiographical ending of the nearly three-hundred year old Tang Empire, and ushered in an era named by historians as the “Five Dynasties” 五代 (907-960).<sup>167</sup>

The actual authority of Zhu Wen and Later Liang was in fact quite limited. Although having accepted his suzerainty, some regional powers remained autonomous, and several other strong warlords denied Zhu’s legitimacy, having either declared continued loyalty to the Tang house, in particular the rulers of Prncedom of Jin 晉 (896-923), or soon declared for themselves imperial authority. However, the weakening of Tang since the 878 did not create another power vacuum or reduce pressure to the south of the Kitan, and the military governors of Tang northern frontiers continued to be formidable forces to the Kitan.<sup>168</sup> But what it entailed was another great change in the political and also cultural landscape on the Eastern Eurasian continent. The decline and fall of the Tang Empire created multiple regional powers largely defined by Tang legacies with earlier Sinic origins, shaping a post-Tang multi-state system.

The physical absence of great powers in the steppe, the decline and fall of the Tang Empire,

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<sup>167</sup> For a general history of the Five Dynasties, see Tao Maobing 陶懋炳, *Wudai shilüe* 五代史略 [A Concise History of the Five Dynasties] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1985); Zheng Xuemeng, 鄭學稼, *Wudai Shiguo shi yanjiu* 五代十國史研究 [Study of Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991); Naomi Standen, “The Five Dynasties” in Twitchett and Smith (eds.), *Cambridge History of China, Vol. 5*, pp. 38-132. For a general history of the southern kingdoms contemporary to the Five Dynasties, see Zheng, *Wudai Shiguo shi yanjiu*; Huge R. Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms between the T’ang and the Sung, 907-979,” in Twitchett and Smith (eds.), *Cambridge History of China, Vol. 5*, pp. 133-205.

<sup>168</sup> Franke and Twitchett, “The Liao,” pp. 54-56.

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and the existence of multiple inheritors of Tang traditions had together shaped the tenth century world surrounding the Kitan society. This context seems to have a twofold impact on the perception of many cultural elements with Sinic origins by the post-Tang elite of many regimes. On the one hand, Tang cultural legacies concerning the imperial designations and some other aspects such as prestigious genealogies and discourses on the geographical and cosmic location, did not diminish together with the demise of the Tang Empire, but became the foci of competition for buttressing legitimacy for many of the post-Tang powers. It is these elements with Sinic origins that were present in the world in which Liao was born and had great impact on the Liao imperial culture. On the other, as discussed, it had primarily been the great social and political changes in Eastern Eurasian continent since 840s, rather than the assumed centripetal power of a loosely defined Chinese civilisation, which contributed to this increasing influence of Tang legacies to the Kitan society, giving it less competition with other cultural traditions than before. And a multi-state system, which had long existed before the tenth century and after 907 was enriched due to the collapse of the Tang Empire, shaped a world in which multiple regional powers built up their distinct identities through sharing, appropriating, modifying and localising common legacies with Tang and earlier Sinic origins. They drew on a similar corpus of cultural traditions but used them in new ways to establish their own legitimacy and not all of them employed legacies to identify with the Han.

In this context, legacies of earlier origins were not monopolised, and were not perceived by contemporaries as being monopolised, by one single state or ethnic group, but had multiple

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facets for the contemporaries. The Liao elite, as will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, they were living in such an age during which regional powers were constructing their distinctiveness through their very shared legacies. Neither the sinicisation which assumes the centripetal power of Han/Chinese civilisation, nor the nativist ideas assuming the Liao adherence to nomadic identity – and thus the ethnic binary between Han and non-Han behind these two frameworks – is adequate and appropriate to provide satisfactory explanation for many aspects of Liao identity.

## **6. Thesis structure**

The thesis focuses on three main topics. Chapter II examines the Liao imperial designations with Sinic origins, in particular the positions of emperor and Son of Heaven, and the calendrical device of reign era-names. It discusses the introduction and adoption of Sinic imperial designations into the Liao society presented in Sinitic and Kitan languages, and compares the differences between the two most important titles/positions of the Liao monarchs – the emperor and qaghan in the contexts of two languages, especially in the Kitan materials. It shows that while in the Sinitic sources Liao monarchs primarily appeared as emperors, they were presented as both emperors and qaghans in the Kitan materials. The two terms were not translations or synonyms for one another, but indicate different roles played by the Liao monarchs in the tribal/nomadic political structure. It further contends that emperor and qaghan, as two facets of Liao imperial rulership, were not targeted at ethnically and culturally different peoples. There was no correlation between the Liao multi-faceted

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rulership, the languages which recorded it, and expected ethnically different audiences/readership.

The chapter then examines the distinct Liao understanding of these imperial designations with Sinic origins in a wider post-Tang context, arguing that their adoption and employment were a result of the aforementioned political and social changes in Eastern Eurasian continent rather than an intention to be sinicised. Through a comparison with what scholars normally term as Chinese regimes neighbouring and preceding Liao, the chapter demonstrates that the above imperial designations, and by extension the preception of imperial authority, had experienced considerable changes common to the post-Tang regimes (both Liao and its Sinic neighbours), being transformed from positions indicating incomparable superiority to those shareable and divisible among multiple imperial claimants. While sharing common ground, the foundations for Liao and its north and south China contemporaries' perception of imperial sovereignty were different, with the former a continuation of a steppe tradition of divisible qaghanship and the latter a newly invented practice without clear historical inspiration.

Chapter III examines the narratives of ancestries of the Liao imperial and consort clans.

Although for modern scholars a constructed common ancestry has normally been one of the most decisive elements defining an ethnic group, it in history should not be discussed only in ethnic discourse. A common origin may bear multiple dimensions, indicating not only the ethnic identity but in many cases also social status. The chapter shows that during the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries Liao imperial and consort clan members had constructed

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for themselves “foreign” origins from outside the Liao realm – Huangdi. Members of the Yel ü house traced their ancestor far back to Huangdi through the royal family of the Han dynasty, and coined a home of origin at Qishui which as presented in Sinitic historiography was indispensable to the rising of the Han dynasty. The Liao consort clan had adopted an origin comparable to that of the Liao imperial house in terms of historical depth and reputation, locating their home of origin at Lanling in north China and chose for themselves one of the most eminent families in history – the Xiao family, from which many eminent figures arose.

On the one hand, these ancestries originated from Huangdi are not only recorded in transmitted texts but also inscribed on tomb stones with Sinitic or Kitan scripts and buried underground. The constructed distant and prestigious origins of the Liao imperial and consort clans had been an integral part of their own family history, rather than something simply demonstrable and aimed to please their Han supporters. On the other, throughout the Liao dynasty the Yel ü and Xiao clans had been maintaining ethnic boundaries and a system of binary between Kitan and Han, which means that to share a common ancestry with their Han subjects in the Liao context was never an indication of ethnic change. Instead of being a marker for Han ethnic identity, an origin from Huangdi signalled the importance of the historical depth and prestige of Huangdi’s descent in Liao historical context and its dimension as universal legacies perceived by the two Liao ruling families. It provided Liao with a distant past and noble bloodline comparable to many of their Eastern Eurasian neighbours, legitimating their eligibility for being the elite stratum within the contemporary multi-state

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world.

Chapter IV investigates the ideas developed by the Liao elite about the place of Liao within the geographical/cosmic space. As we shall see, in the Sinitic materials, the Liao elite had assigned Liao with cosmic elements representing the cardinal direction of north, such as the colour of Black, the agent of Water, and their martial character, mirroring a Liao self-perceived identity as “northerners.” The discussion challenges the prevailing idea that the Liao’s identification with Water was because it succeeded the Metal of Later Jin. Instead, this chapter argues that the discourse of cosmic agents in the Liao historical context was in fact a “spatial/cosmological” issue. Different from the model of the lineal dynastic succession, the Five Agents in the Liao context were spatially assigned to different regimes of the contemporary multistate system.

Besides a northern identity, the Liao elite had developed a Liao-centric ideology as well. Evidence in Kitan, and especially in Sinitic, confirm that Liao constantly appeared as a “central” state. As mirrored by the Sinitic sources for internal consumption (e.g. inscriptions of tombs and temple stelae) and diplomatic correspondence with vassal states, while ascribing Liao with elements representing the north, the Liao elite constantly emphasised the central position of Liao within the contemporary multistate world. Liao was constructed as the direct projection of the Pole Star, which in Sinitic classics represented the centre of the universe, on the earth. This constructed connection between the Pole Star and the Liao state in the view of Liao elite had enhanced the Liao dynastic legitimacy and justified its superiority and

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centrality over its many contemporary neighbours. In the Liao discourse, the identity of Liao in geographical space and cosmos was thus dual-faceted, as both a northern and a central state, and was largely shaped by its contemporary political context and interstate relations.

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## Chapter II Emperors in the Steppe: The Divisible Rulership and the Imperial Designations of the Liao Dynasty

This chapter investigates the Liao adoption of imperial designations with Sinic origins, with a focus on the positions of *huangdi* (emperor) and *tianzi* (Son of Heaven), and calendrical device of *nianhao* (reign era-names). As we shall see, while sharing much common ground, in the tenth and eleventh centuries the Liao elite employed these designations in new ways which were distinct from their Sinic predecessors and neighbours. This chapter thus emphasises the interactive relations between cultures with Sinic and steppe origins and the cultural inclusiveness of the Liao Empire, thereby interrogating the paradigm which dichotomises the Liao identity as either “Han/Chinese” or “nomads.”

Scholars have noted that the royal/imperial sovereignty has throughout history rarely been singular but has normally been multi-faceted. For instance, Charlemagne the Great was not simply a Roman emperor (after 800), but for different audiences or in different contexts could also enact as chieftain of the Franks, or a patron and follower of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> One example from the Eastern Eurasian context was the multiple roles played by the Qing monarchs. For instance, the Qing ruler Qianlong was not only an emperor (*huangdi*), but also, as James L. Hevia has pointed out, “the Chinese Son of Heaven; the successor to the rulership of Genghis Khan, and to the Jin and Yuan dynasties, and hence Khan of Khans; cakravartin king and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Pierre Rich , *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe*, Michael Idomir Allen (trans.), (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).



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‘Chinese *Aśoka Dharmarāja*’....”<sup>2</sup> Each facet was integral to the ultimate overlordship of the Qing Empire but had its different targeted audiences, and the ideas behind each (emperor, qaghan, etc.) differed from one another and derived from distinct cultural traditions.<sup>3</sup>

As Crossley has insightfully pointed out, the approach of emphasising the multiple facets of Qing rulership helps to avoid the overly simplistic binary of treating the Qing rulership as either Manchu or Han.<sup>4</sup> It also provides a useful framework for studying earlier dynasties with non-Han origins, such as Liao and Jin. When it comes to the Liao dynasty, there have in fact been few serious works on the multi-rulership of the Liao monarchs. As Crossley precisely summarises, in existing scholarship the founding rulers of Liao and Jin have been “noted for having used the Chinese emperorship to alter the traditional relationship between rulers and elites in their own societies; as a result, emperorship in China was repeatedly revitalized and elaborated.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, for some scholars the declaration of emperorship by the first Liao monarch Abaoji indicated a replacement of his identity and authority as a steppe qaghan by those of a Han style emperor, thus indicating the gradual transformation of Liao from a nomadic power to a sinicised regime.<sup>6</sup> But as will be discussed,

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<sup>2</sup> James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men From Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy* (Durham, N. C: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 30; also see Pamela Kyle Crossley, “The Rulerships of China,” *The American Historical Review*, 97. 5 (1992), pp. 1468-83.

<sup>3</sup> Hevia, *Cherishing Men From Afar*, pp. 29-56; Crossley, “The Rulerships of China.”

<sup>4</sup> Crossley, “The Rulerships of China,” p. 1483.

<sup>5</sup> Crossley, “The Rulerships of China,” p. 1483.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance, Lin Hu 林喆, “Yelü Abaoji jianguo fanglüe kao: Jianlun fei Hanzu zhengquan zhi Hanhua mingti” 耶律阿保机建国方略考—兼论非汉族政权之汉化命题 [An Examination of the State-building Strategy of Yelü Abaoji: With a Discussion of the Topic of Sinicization of Non-Han Regimes], *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 (2012: 4), pp. 52-68, p. 60.

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the Liao rulers, just like the Qing khans who, alongside being an emperor continued to undertake the role of a khan,<sup>7</sup> did not abandon their identity and authority as Liao qaghans but simultaneously assumed two positions. Furthermore, as for imperial designations with Sinic origins, although Liao monarchs adopted them to justify their imperial authority, they understood these designations and the Liao imperial sovereignty very differently from their southern neighbours in north and south China. The imperial authority justified by Sinitic terminology in the Liao historical context was something divisible rather than one indicating incomparable superiority, which mirrors the strong impact of steppe cultural legacies on Liao imperial culture.

On the other hand, in discussions of the multi-faceted rulership of Qing, historians sometimes conclude that each facet had their targeted audiences, especially when discussing the qaghanship and emperorship. For some scholars, the simultaneous identities of non-Han rulers as qaghan and emperor seem to indicate cultural and ethnic divisions between an Inner Asian world and a Sinic world, and between non-Han and Han traditions.<sup>8</sup> These divisions and the multiple facets of non-Han imperial rulership are believed to be associated with linguistic, institutional and legal differences between empire's subject peoples of diverse ethnic backgrounds, demonstrated to them and come down to us primarily via materials in multiple languages.<sup>9</sup> But as we shall see, in the case of the Liao dynasty, while the emperorship and qaghanship were indeed derived from distinctive cultural traditions and

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<sup>7</sup> Crossley, "The Rulerships of China," p. 1474.

<sup>8</sup> Crossley, "The Rulerships of China"; Hevia, *Cherishing Men From Afar*, pp. 29-56.

<sup>9</sup> Rawski, "Reenvisioning the Qing," pp. 833-38; Millward, *Beyond The Pass*, pp. 197-203.

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played different functionalities, they were not used and perceived in a one-to-one relationship with supposed ethnically and culturally different audiences, and were not separately demonstrated to them in different languages. Rather, for those who could understand the Kitan language, the Liao rulers were a qaghan as well as an emperor, not a qaghan only.

In the following sections, I will first discuss those imperial designations adopted by Liao as shown by materials written in both Sinitic and Kitan. The chapter then examines the employment of the title of emperor in the context of the Kitan language, and its differences from that of qaghan. It finally investigates the distinct Liao ways of understanding the imperial sovereignty defined by designations with Sinitic origins.

## **1. The Liao imperial designations**

In the centuries prior to the collapse of the Uighur Qaghanate, imperial traditions and designations with steppe origins held influence on the Eastern Eurasian continent. Beyond their employment by leaders of nomadic tribes, they had a great impact on the Sinitic world. For instance, the first Sui 隋 (581-619) monarch had held the title of qaghan alongside his designations of emperor and Son of Heaven derived from Sinitic ideologies. Then during the late Sui period, Liu Wuzhou 劉武周 (d. 620), a warlord, not only declared himself emperor following the Sinitic tradition, but also accepted the investiture by his steppe overlord – the Turkic Shibi Qaghan 始畢可汗 (r. 609-619) – as Dingyang Qaghan 定楊可汗. Another warlord, Liang Shidu 梁師都 (571-628), was titled by Shibi as Percipient Son of Heaven 解

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事天子 as well as Magnanimous Bilg äQaghan 大度毗伽可汗.<sup>10</sup> After his defeat of the Eastern Turkic Qaghanate, the second Tang emperor, Li Shimin 李世民 (Taizong, r. 626-649) accepted the title and position of Heavenly Qaghan presented by subordinate nomads, assuming the role of the suzerain of steppe peoples.<sup>11</sup>

However, from the tenth century onwards many cultural elements with Sinic origins became more influential at the frontiers. The Liao elite had borrowed and introduced them from their Sinic neighbours and predecessors, including imperial designations such as the title/position of emperor, honorific title (*zunhao* 尊號), temple name (*miaohao* 廟號), posthumous name (*shihao* 謚號), and reign era-names (*nianhao*), etc.<sup>12</sup> The employment of these titles is an indicator of an increase in the Sinic cultural impact on the steppe and frontier societies, and reveal the Liao elites' cultural orientation as well as the wider cultural and political context in

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<sup>10</sup> Michael R. Drompp, "Chinese 'Qaghans' appointed by the Türks," *Tang Studies*, 25 (2007), pp. 1-20; Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 118-19.

<sup>11</sup> Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, pp. 119-27; Zhu Zhenhong 朱振宏, "Tangdai 'huangdi · tian kehan' shiyi" 唐代 "皇帝 · 天可汗" 釋義 [The Term "Emperor · Tängri Qaghan"], *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 (2003:1), pp. 413-33; Pan Yihong, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan: Sui-Tang China and Its Neighbors* (Bellingham, Washington: 1997).

<sup>12</sup> On these designations, see for instance, Edward H. Schafer, "The Origin of an Era," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 85.4 (1965), pp. 543-50; Arthur F. Wright and Edward Fagan, "Era Names and Zeitgeist," *Etudes Asiatiques*, 5 (1951), pp. 113-21; Liu Zehua 刘泽华 and Hou Dongyang 侯东阳, "Lun diwang zunhao de zhengzhi wenhua yiyi" 论帝王尊号的政治文化意义 [On the Political and Cultural Connotations of Honorific Titles], *Xueshu yuekan* 学术月刊 (1993:11), pp. 31, 63-68; Sun Dechang 孙德昌, "Shihao, miaohao, nianhao kaolue" 謚号 庙号 年号考略 [On the Posthumous Titles, Temples Names and Era-names], *Shehui kexue jikan* 社会科学辑刊 (1996: 01), p. 120; Shi Suyuan 史苏苑 "Miaohao, shihao, zunhao kaoshu" 庙号 謚号 尊号考述 [On the Temple Names, Posthumous Titles, and Honorific Titles], *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社会科学战线 (1983:1), pp. 114-17.

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which Liao was born.

In 221 BCE, Ying Zheng 嬴政 (r. 247-210 BCE) adopted the new title of *huangdi* and became the first emperor of the Qin 秦 dynasty (221-207 BCE). The new position replaced his previous title of “king” (*wang*), which had also been held by the monarchs of Shang 商 (1600-1046 BCE) and Zhou 周 (1046-256 BCE) dynasties. The new title was a combination of *huang* and *di* from the mythical rulers of *Taihuang* 泰皇 (Tai Sovereign) and *Wudi* 五帝 (Five Lords). It indicates the first emperor’s unprecedented exploit of unifying the other six kingdoms under the Zhou suzerainty and pacifying the “civilised” world, which in his eyes meant he had surpassed all sagely rulers in the past.<sup>13</sup> *Huangdi* was inherited by the founding ruler of the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE) and throughout the next two millennia it was the most superior title for monarchs under Sinic cultural and political influence.

Closely intertwined with the concept of *huangdi* was that of Son of Heaven or *tianzi*, created in the Western Zhou period (1046-771 BCE) for the Zhou kings. Heaven became a deity during the Zhou era, and the Son of Heaven emerged to denote the Zhou monarchs, who both saw themselves and were perceived to have dominated the world according to the Mandate of Heaven.<sup>14</sup> The concept that the source of rulership was derived from divine power had been an integral part of Sinic cosmologies long before the Zhou era, but the Zhou monarchs

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<sup>13</sup> Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 [Historical Records] (91 BCE; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 6.235-36.

<sup>14</sup> Guo Dingtang 郭鼎堂 (Guo Moruo 郭沫若), *Xian Qin tiandao guan zhi jinzhan* 先秦天道觀之進展 [On the Way of Heaven during the Pre-Qin Era] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936).

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ascribed more importance to the force of one's virtue, emphasising that only the virtuous would be chosen by the heaven and thus possess legitimate kingship.<sup>15</sup> Source limitations mean it is unclear whether the first emperor Ying Zheng had concurrently held the position of Son of Heaven, and what precisely the relationship was between an emperor and a Son of Heaven during the Qin dynasty. It seems that Ying Zheng was indifferent to the traditional title of Son of Heaven.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, the monarchs of the Han dynasty assumed both positions, and the concept of emperor gradually became intertwined with that of Son of Heaven. On the one hand, when it comes to symbolism and function within Sinic cosmology, the two positions were by no means identical. While *huangdi* “came to be associated with the emperor's stewardship of the state and his control over domestic government, *tianzi* was associated with his role as a bridge to the deities of Heaven and Earth and his authority over ‘all under Heaven’, including foreign tributaries of China.”<sup>17</sup> On the other, during the Han dynasty Confucians had made

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<sup>15</sup> Guo Guanghua 郭光华, “Shilun Yin Zhou ‘tianming guan’ de yanjin” 试论殷周 “天命观” 的演进 [On the Concept of Mandate of Heaven during the Yin and Zhou Periods], *Ningxia daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 宁夏大学学报 (社会科学版) (1983:4), pp. 26-31.

<sup>16</sup> Sugimura Shinji 杉村伸二, “Shin Kan hatsu ni okeru ‘kōtei’ to ‘tenshi’: Sengoku kōki—Kan hatsu no kunisei tenkai to kunshu gō” 秦漢初における「皇帝」と「天子」—戦国後期～漢初の国制展開と君主号 [“Emperor” and “Son of Heaven” during the Qin and Early Han Periods: Institutional Developments in Early Han and the Imperial Designations], *Fukuoka kyōiku daigaku kiyō* 福岡教育大学紀要 60.2 (2011), pp. 1-17, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 86, which is drawn upon Nishijima Sadao 西嶋定生, “Kōtei shihai no seiritsu” 皇帝支配の成立 [The Formation of Imperial Authority], in *Iwanami kōza sekai rekishi 4* 岩波講座 世界歴史 4 [Iwanami Lectures: World History 4] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten,

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efforts to “surround the [*huangdi*] concept with precepts of moral responsibility and the doctrine of the provisional conferment of the Mandate.”<sup>18</sup> These two different concepts had gradually become inseparable from one another. A legal emperor must be one who saw him/herself or were perceived to have received the Mandate of Heaven and been the Son of Heaven, and a true Son of Heaven, with very few exceptions as mentioned later, would always declare his/her incomparable emperorship. Thus in practice the two were always intertwined and cannot be clearly separated from one another.

From the Han period onwards, reign era-names also became an indispensable part of imperial culture. The temporal authority – the power to manage “time” through designing and issuing a calendar – was an important aspect of Sinic imperial sovereignty,<sup>19</sup> and era-names were integral to calendrical designations from the reign of the Wu emperor (141-87 BCE).<sup>20</sup> A calendar was understood to be a mirror of the law of heaven, and the power of designing and issuing calendars symbolised the possession of the Mandate of Heaven.<sup>21</sup> To standardise the temporal flow and to control the temporal rhythm via calendars thus bore significant political implications and symbolised the imperial authority.<sup>22</sup> Era-names, as ways of naming and

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1970), pp. 217-56.

<sup>18</sup> Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, p. 86, drawn upon Sadao, “Kōtei shihai no seiritsu.”

<sup>19</sup> Jiang Xiaoyuan 江晓原, *Tianxue zhenyuan* 天学真原 [The Nature of Astrology] (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> The calendar included many aspects, such as issuing era-names, predicting eclipse, selecting the intercalary months and reflecting the beginning of seasons, etc. See Jiang, *Tianxue zhenyuan*, pp. 137-66.

<sup>21</sup> Sun Xiaochun 孙小淳, “Tianwen xue zai gudai Zhongguo shehui wenhua zhong de zuoyong” 天文学在古代中国社会文化中的作用 [The Role of Astronomy in Ancient Chinese Society and Culture], *Zhongguo keji shi zazhi* 中国科技史杂志 30.1 (2009), pp. 5-15, pp. 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> Wei Bing 韦兵, “Jingzheng yu rentong: Cong liri banci, lifa zhi zheng kan Song yu zhoubian minzu

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recording years, normally employed auspicious Sinitic characters to convey the anticipation for dynastic legitimacy.<sup>23</sup> The importance of designing era-names also went beyond domestic affairs. In the area of interstate interaction, for monarchs of a regime, whether or not to accept the era-names of another monarch was an important indicator of their recognition or denial of another's authority to measure time and thus also the imperial claim to legitimacy and suzerainty of that another monarch. And a public declaration of self-designated era-names was an indicator of an overt appeal to imperial power.<sup>24</sup>

Two points must be raised here. First, in theory none of the above imperial designations were divisible, but instead exclusive to the perceived one true monarch who had received the favour of heaven. That means, at any given time there could only be one legitimate emperor/Son of Heaven. Second, with only a few exceptions, since the Han period the above concepts were normally intertwined with and inseparable from one another. A legal emperor meant the true Son of Heaven, holder of Mandate of Heaven, and the one in possession of the exclusive power to decide era-names. However, as will be unravelled in later sections, from the tenth century until the era of Mongol conquest, continental Eastern Eurasia witnessed many changes to the imperial culture with Sinic origins, to which the Liao elite were a great

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zhengquan de guanxi” 竞争与认同：从历日颁赐、历法之争看宋与周边民族政权的关系 [Competition and Recognition: Examining the Relationship between the Song Dynasty and the Surrounding States from the Angle of Conferment of and Contestation over Calendar], *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究 (2008:5), pp. 74-82, pp. 74-75.

<sup>23</sup> Yang Dongfu 杨东甫, “Niaohao tanwei—Jian yu Shi Suwan xiansheng shangque” 年号探微—兼与史苏宛先生商榷 [Examination of Reign Era-names: With a Discussion with Shi Suwan], *Guangxi shiyuan xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 广西师院学报 (哲学社会科学版) (1993:1), pp. 83-89.

<sup>24</sup> Wei, “Jingzheng yu rentong,” pp. 74-75.



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contributor.

### **Liao imperial designations in Sinitic materials**

According to extant archaeological findings, both era-names and the title of *huangdi* had been employed by Abaoji at home no later than 923. In 1974, a stele engraved in Sinitic was discovered at Chifeng in Inner Mongolia, entitled “Marriage Records of the [Xi] King.”<sup>25</sup>

According to the stele itself, it was engraved in the second year of Tianzan 天贊 (923). The employment of Tianzan indicates that the stele was written and erected within the realm under Liao authority, because Tianzan was the second era-name employed by Abaoji.<sup>26</sup> The term *huangdi* also appears in the text, and refers to the reigning emperor Abaoji.<sup>27</sup>

There were several further imperial designations indivisible to the position of emperor, such as temple names used in ancestral temples for sacrifices and the veneration of deceased emperors, posthumous names also designated for deceased emperors describing their deeds and virtue, and honorific titles eulogising emperors (living or dead). For instance, as Abaoji

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<sup>25</sup> See “‘Dawang ji jie qinshi’ bei” 大王記結親事碑 [The Inscription Which Records the Marriage of the (Xi) King], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 1-2; Another transcription of the same inscription, with some differences in the characters, is in Li Yi 李毅, “Neimenggu Ningcheng xian faxian ‘Liaodai dawang jie qinshi’ bei” 內蒙古宁城县发现辽代大王结亲事碑 [Discovery of the “Inscription Which Records the Marriage of the (Xi) King” at the Ningcheng County of Inner Mongolia], *Kaogu* 考古 (2003:4), pp. 92-95.

<sup>26</sup> According to Song and Yuan sources, the first era-name employed by Abaoji was Shence 神冊, Divine Investiture, although up to now we have found no contemporary Liao evidence. See for instance, *QDGSZ* 1.2; *LS*, 1:1.10.

<sup>27</sup> “‘Dawang ji jie qinshi’ bei,” p. 2; Li, “‘Liaodai dawang jie qinshi’ bei,” p. 94.

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was the founding emperor of Liao, his temple name was Taizu 太祖, Grand Genitor, which follows the preexisting Sinic tradition of referring to dynastic initiators as either Grand or High Genitor (Gaozu 高祖).<sup>28</sup> Abaoji also got his honorific title and posthumous names. We have no contemporary evidence from Abaoji's period, although the *LS* does record that he had twice taken on honorific titles, first in 907 and then 916. In Sinitic tomb inscriptions dating to the late tenth and eleventh century, several honorific titles are used for Abaoji – “Great Sage Emperor” 大聖皇帝, “Great Sage Heavenly Emperor” 大聖天皇帝, and “Great Sage and Great Wise Heavenly Emperor” 大聖大明天皇帝.<sup>29</sup>

Posthumous names for Abaoji were designated posthumously by the Liao court. According to the *LS*, in 926 after the death of Abaoji, the Liao court followed preexisting tradition by presenting him with the first posthumous name of *shengtian huangdi* 昇天皇帝, literally “the emperor who ascended to the heavens.”<sup>30</sup> This record in *LS* is attested by archaeological evidence. In 2007, at a site in Balin Zuoqi 巴林左旗 that is normally considered to be the site of Abaoji's tomb, a stele dedicated to Abaoji inscribed in the second year of Tianzan (927) records that “the *shengtian huangdi* camped at this mountain each time he was doing a

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<sup>28</sup> There is no difference between Gaozu and Taizu. In classics Taizu is the normal designation for dynastic initiators in ancestral temples. Gaozu initially referred to the founding emperor of the Han dynasty, whose honorific title was *Gao huangdi* and whose temple name was Taizu. Gaozu was a misused combination of the two characters (Gao and zu) by Han-dynasty historian Sima Qian, which was nevertheless followed by later dynasties as an alternative expression of Taizu.

<sup>29</sup> Liu Fengzhu 刘凤翥, “Liao Taizu zunhao shihao kaobian” 辽太祖尊号谥号考辨 [On the Honorific and Posthumous Titles of Liao Taizu], *Shehui kexue jikan* 社会科学辑刊 (1979: 1), pp. 113-14.

<sup>30</sup> *LS*, 1:2.23; Liu, “Liao Taizu zunhao shihao kaobian,” p. 113. .

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hunting tour” 昇天皇帝每因游獵 [多] 駐蹕于山.<sup>31</sup> From other pieces of this same inscription, we also identify the term *yingtian huanghou* 應天皇后<sup>32</sup> (Empress Following the Heaven), in reference to Abaoji’s empress, which indicates the adoption of designations with Sinic origin for the consort clan.

Compared with above designations, we do not know much about the title of “Son of Heaven” in the Liao period. The perception of heaven-granted rulership, and ideas similar to the Sinic concept of the Mandate of Heaven are common across human history and are not unique to Sinic empires. Nevertheless, the adoption of the title of Heavenly Emperor, the employment of “heaven” in era-names such as Tianzan and Tianxian 天顯 by Abaoji, and many other designations used by subsequent Liao emperors, do indicate the importance of heaven-sanctioned rulership in the Liao imperial ideology.

But the position of Son of Heaven might have been familiar to the Kitan rulers long before Abaoji’s reign due to the intensive interactions between frontier societies and Sinic regimes to their south. During the Liao period, the title was likely also well-known or adopted by Liao emperors as well. According to the Song source *Jiu Wudai shi*, Abaoji used “Son of Heaven”

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<sup>31</sup> See Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中国社会科学院考古研究所, Neimenggu dier kaogudui 内蒙古第二考古队, and Neimenggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 内蒙古文物考古研究所, “Neimenggu Balin Zuoqi Liaodai zuling Guifushan jianzhu jizhi” 内蒙古巴林左旗辽代祖陵龟趺山建筑基址 [Relics of the Building Base of the Liao Ancestral Tomb at Guifu Mountain in Balin Zuoqi of Inner Mongolia] *Kaogu* 考古 (2011: 8), pp. 3-12, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> “Guifushan jianzhu jizhi,” p. 9.

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to refer to Later Tang emperors when he met a Later Tang envoy.<sup>33</sup> During the reign of the second Liao emperor Deguang, he had invested Shi Jingtang as a “Son of Heaven.”<sup>34</sup> Citing the *Beizheng jishi* 北征紀實, the *Sanchao beimeng huibian* 三朝北盟會編 – a history of Liao, Song and Jin relations – records that the last Liao emperor referred to himself as Son of Heaven.<sup>35</sup> It is worth mentioning that, as appears in Kitan language materials (tomb inscriptions) the second Liao emperor Deguang had sometimes been called “Son of Heaven Emperor,” an honorific title exclusively denoting him.<sup>36</sup> Here, “Son of Heaven” can be understood either as “the son of the Heavenly Emperor (Abaoji)” or just Son of Heaven with its literal meaning. But regardless of what it meant, Son of Heaven in this specific example was simply part of the honorific title which was preserved exclusively for Deguang in the Kitan language context, rather than an institutional position like *huangdi* held by each Liao emperor.

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<sup>33</sup> JWDS, 11:137.4280-82.

<sup>34</sup> See discussions by Standen, “What Nomads Want”; Naomi Standen, “Integration and Separation: The Framing of the Liao Dynasty (907–1125) in Chinese sources,” *Asia Major* (Third Series) 24:2 (2011), pp. 147-98; Xue, “Age of Emperors,” pp. 60-67.

<sup>35</sup> Xu Mengzi 徐夢梓, *Sanchao beimeng huibian* 三朝北盟會編 [Records of the Song Relations with the North during the Three Reigns] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 1:21.154. The *LS* normally uses the terms containing Son of Heaven to denote vestments and rituals related to Liao emperors, such as *tianzi yili* 天子儀禮 (Son of Heaven rituals), but we do not know if the phrases were copied from Liao-period materials, or used merely by Yuan historians.

<sup>36</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 178, 412, 570, 828. In Sinitic materials, Deguang’s honorific titles are different. See Xiao Aimin 肖爱民, “Liao Taizong Yelü Deguang de zunhao yu shihao tanxi” 辽太宗耶律德光的尊号与谥号探析 [On the Honorific and Posthumous Titles of Liao Taizong Yelü Deguang], *Neimenggu shehui kexue* (Hanwen ban) 内蒙古社会科学 (汉文版) 37.5 (2016), pp. 65-68.

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## Liao imperial designations in the Kitan language context

Imperial designations with Sinic origins also entered the Kitan language and in this case too were preserved exclusively for Liao ruling members. For instance, *huangdi* (emperor) in the Kitan large script was written in the same form as Sinitic 皇帝. It can be found early on in an epitaph inscribed with Kitan large script in commemoration of Abaoji's exploits after his death in 926.<sup>37</sup>

In 1041, in a tomb inscription for a Kitan nobleman we see 𐰽𐰺𐰍𐰏𐰤 and 𐰽𐰺𐰍𐰏𐰤, which corresponds to the Sinitic “Shengzong *huangdi* 聖宗皇帝,” the temple name of the sixth Liao emperor, and “Chengtian *taihou* 承天太后,” the honorific title of the empress dowager.<sup>38</sup> A tomb inscription from 1057 for a Liao royal member contains 𐰽𐰺𐰍𐰏𐰤, which refers to the honorific title of Abaoji, which literally means the “Heavenly Golden Emperor” and is most likely a translation of or corresponds to his Sinitic honorific title 大聖大明皇帝 (*Dasheng daming huangdi*, the Great Sage and Great Bright Emperor).<sup>39</sup> And in the tomb inscription for Yelü Xinde from 1114, we see 𐰽𐰺𐰍𐰏𐰤 which corresponds to the “Daozong *huangdi* 道宗皇帝” in Sinitic, the temple name of the eighth Liao monarch.<sup>40</sup>

In the small script, *huangdi* is presented as 𐰺𐰏𐰤. For instance, a 1053 tomb inscription written for Yelü Zongjiao mentions 𐰽𐰺𐰍𐰏𐰤 (“of Jingzong *huangdi*” 景宗皇帝之 in

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<sup>37</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 593.

<sup>38</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 518.

<sup>39</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 360, 523.

<sup>40</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 416, 573.

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Sinitic), 聖宗皇帝 (“Shengzong *huangdi*” 聖宗皇帝 in Sinitic), and 承天皇太后 (Chengtian *huangtaihou*” 承天皇太后 in Sinitic).<sup>41</sup>

In fact, the Kitan language retained the title of qaghan to denote Liao monarchs, and in many Kitan tomb inscriptions we find the two titles of qaghan 可汗 (in Kitan small script)<sup>42</sup> and emperor (*huangdi*) employed in the same text. It is not entirely clear when referring to the Liao monarchs in which context “qaghan” was used and in which “emperor” was employed, because extant deciphered materials are limited in number and in many cases lack information on the context within which the two designations were employed. But based on deciphered pieces, several tentative conclusions can be made regarding some of their commonalities and differences in the context of the Kitan language.

First, as common to regimes under both Sinic and steppe cultural influences, both “qaghan” and “emperor” can be used to refer to Liao monarchs. For instance, the 1053 inscription mentioned above states that “the grandfather of the prince was the Jingzong Emperor, the fifth qaghan of the Yel ü clan.”<sup>43</sup> The title/position of emperor and qaghan denote the same person, the fifth ruler of the Liao dynasty, Yel ü Xian 耶律賢 (r. 969-982). In the inscription written for the Liao Xingzong 興宗 Emperor (r. 1031-1055), the text mentions the “sixth sage qan,”<sup>44</sup> which refers to the sixth Liao monarch Yel ü Longxu 耶律隆緒 (Shengzong 聖

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<sup>41</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 659-60.

<sup>42</sup> There was no difference between “qan” and “qaghan” in the Liao dynasty.

<sup>43</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 659.

<sup>44</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 81, 673.

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宗 Emperor, r. 983-1031), who in many other Kitan inscriptions is referred to as emperor (*huangdi*). The two titles were also used to denote reigning Liao rulers. For example, in some inscriptions, we find expressions such as “Qan of the (Yel ü Imperial) Tent” or “Qaghan of the (Yel ü Imperial) Tent,” which refer to the reigning Liao monarchs at the time.<sup>45</sup> We also find examples denoting the reigning Liao rulers as emperor (*huangdi*) by combining the title of emperor with era-names, such as “The reign of the present sage (who is) the Qingning Emperor” which appears in the *Eulogy for Empress Renyi*.<sup>46</sup> It was written after the second year of Yel ü Hongji’s Dakang 大康 reign (1075-1084), but denotes the emperor by his first era-name Qingning 清寧 (1055-1064).

The second thing the two titles/positions have in common is that both emperor and qaghan can be used when referring to Song monarchs. This implies that they were possibly applicable in a broad sense to dynastic rulers with Sinic origins or who had ruled over Sinic regimes.

“Emperor,” *huangdi*, was itself an imperial title employed by monarchs of Sinic regimes, and as will be discussed later, Liao rulers understood the position as divisible rather than exclusive to one, and recognised the neighbouring monarchs of Sinic empires as “emperors” as well. Qaghan was also perceived as a divisible title/position, and before and during Liao for rulers with steppe backgrounds it was applicable to other monarchs, including those of Sinic regimes. Thus in the Liao historical context, monarchs other than Song emperors that had Sinic backgrounds may also appear as either emperor or qaghan, or both, in the Kitan language context.

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<sup>45</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 74, 264, 663, 845.

<sup>46</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 733; also see pp. 704, 744.

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For instance, the text of the tomb inscription for Fenwuni, dated 1068, mentions “the court of the new qaghan of the Song state.”<sup>47</sup> The broader context concerns the tomb owner’s official visit to the Song dynasty to congratulate the accession of the new Song emperor.<sup>48</sup> Another example is the above mentioned tomb inscription for the Renyi Empress which includes the expression “the qaghan of the Great Song State, (who is) Renzong.” As we can observe, it refers to the fourth emperor of Song by the title of qaghan, and uses his temple name which corresponds to Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1022-1063) in Sinitic.<sup>49</sup>

Just as it was for Liao monarchs, the title of emperor was applicable to Song rulers. For instance, the 1072 tomb inscription for Yel ü Renxian describes the tomb owner’s 1042 mission to Song to negotiate territorial disputes over *Guannan shixian* 關南十縣 (The Ten Counties South of the Pass) at the Liao-Song border.<sup>50</sup> Because the royal surname of Song monarchs was Zhao, the text employed 𧰨主 (Zhao emperor) and the genitive form 𧰨部 (of Zhao emperor) to denote the reigning Song ruler. The above information confirms that in Kitan records both “qaghan” and “emperor” could be applied to denote monarchs of both Liao and Song, who maintained diplomatic parity and concluded fictive kinship from the 1005 Chanyuan Covenant. Of course, the above conclusion primarily works if in the Kitan language 主 (皇 *huang* in Sinitic) is an abbreviation and synonym of 主王 (皇帝 *huangdi*

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<sup>47</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 689.

<sup>48</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 95.

<sup>49</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 734; Chinggeltai et al., *Qidan xiaozi yanjiu* 契丹小字研究 [Studies of the Kitan Small Script] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1985), p. 116.

<sup>50</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 103, 698.



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in Sinitic). In Sinic discourse, sometimes a *huangdi* was considered higher than a *di* in hierarchy, but in general there seems to be no significant distinction between a *huangdi* and a *huang*. However, the extant inscriptions which have employed 𐰚𐰝 all refer to the Liao monarchs as 𐰚𐰝 and only use 𐰚 for the monarchs of Song. Therefore if the writers of the inscriptions had considered the two to be different in hierarchy, then it would suggest that in the materials written in Kitan (mostly for internal consumption) the Liao side might have not seen Song emperors as equals, although since 1005 in diplomacy the Song side was recognised by Liao as parity and in their exchanged Sinitic documents the Song emperors were regarded as equal to the Liao emperors.

In twelfth-century Kitan materials, the title of qaghan was applicable to the monarch of the Jin Empire as well,<sup>51</sup> but it is unclear if Jin qaghans were referred to as emperor in the same language. As we have seen, both terms appear in materials in the same language (Kitan) rather than a one-to-one relation whereby “qaghan” appears in Kitan and “*huangdi*” appears in Sinitic, thus they must not have been used simply as translations or synonyms of one another, as normally assumed by scholars.<sup>52</sup> My argument is further strengthened by their different functions observed from deciphered Kitan materials, as will be discussed below. As

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<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, Andrew Shimunek, “A New Decipherment and Linguistic Reconstruction of the Kitan–Chinese Bilingual Inscription of 1134 A.D.,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung*, 67.1 (2014), pp. 97-118, although Shimunek translates 𐰚𐰝 (𐰚𐰝𐰚, qa.ȝa.an), which means “of qaghan,” as “of emperor” in English.

<sup>52</sup> See for instance, Shimunek, “The Kitan–Chinese Bilingual Inscription”; Luo Xin 罗新, *Zhongguo beizu minghao yanjiu* 中古北族名号研究 [Studies on the Titulary of Medieval Inner Asian Peoples] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009), pp. 225-37.

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the following discussion will show, although “qaghan” and “emperor” derive from different cultural traditions, the facet of Liao monarchs as emperor was applicable to nomadic or steppe audiences and subjects, and there was no clear-cut ethnic binary or ethnically distinct audiences behind Liao rulers’ identities as a qaghan and an emperor. Then, how did the terms differ in the Kitan language context?

Since the differences involve distinctions between elite lineages within the Liao state, an introduction to the structure of Liao royal house is in order. The Liao royal membership was possessed by the so-called Three Patriarchal Households – the First, the Second, and the Third (Meng 孟, Zhong 仲, Ji 季), and the Two Sectors 兩院 – the Five (Northern) Divisions (*wuyuan* 五院) and the Six (Southern) Divisions (*liuyuan* 六院).<sup>53</sup> The defining factor for royal membership was a common descent from the great-great grandfather of the founding emperor Abaoji. According to Sinitic records, the Liao court followed the Confucian principle of posthumously venerating Abaoji’s ancestors of the four previous generations, designating temple names for each, with his great-great grandfather as Suzu Emperor 肅祖皇帝, great grandfather as Yizu Emperor 懿祖皇帝, grandfather as Xuanzu Emperor 玄祖皇帝 and father as Dezu Emperor 德祖皇帝. All descendants of Suzu were included in the royal membership.<sup>54</sup> But descendants of Abaoji’s grandfather Xuanzu were deemed closer in term of their family ties, and those of the Five Divisions and the Six Divisions as more distant. In the *LS*, the term *yizhang san fufang* 一帳三父房 (The One

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<sup>53</sup> Wang Shanjun 王善军, “Lun Liaodai huangzu” 论辽代皇族 [On the Liao Royal Clan], *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究 (2003:5), pp. 59-68, pp. 59-60.

<sup>54</sup> Wang, “Lun Liaodai huangzu,” p. 60.

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Tent and the Three Patriarchal Households) primarily denotes Xuanzu's descendants, with the "One Tent" referring to Abaoji's descendants, members of which were originally within the category of the Third Patriarchal Household but possibly with an increasing number of members gradually acquiring the separate status and category.<sup>55</sup>

Based on this background information, we will now discuss the cases in which "qaghan" seems to have been preferred. First, the concept of qaghan was closely associated with discussions of genealogies. For instance, as discussed earlier Yel ü Xian is presented as the fifth qaghan of the "Yel ü clan" and one common appellation for reigning Liao monarchs is "Qan/Qaghan of the (Yel ü Imperial) Tent." Thus this usage seems to have placed emphasis on Liao qaghans' role as the leader of their clan besides indicating their monarchical role of the state.

Also, Aisin Gioro Ulhicun has reflected upon the notion of "Qaghan's Horizontal Tent."<sup>56</sup> She argues that "Qaghan's Horizontal Tent" in Kitan was equivalent to "*da hengzhang*" 大横帳 (The Great Horizontal Tent) in Sinitic. They were synonyms for one another and defined the membership of Three Patriarchal Households as well as the Two Sectors. "Qaghan" or *da*

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<sup>55</sup> Wang Shanjun 王善军, "Liaochao hengzhang xinkao" 辽朝横帐新考 [New Reflections on the "Horizontal Tent" of the Liao Dynasty], *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 (2003:2), pp. 175-79, p. 178; Wang, "Lun Liaodai huangzu," p. 61.

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Aisin Gioro Ulhicun 愛新覺羅 烏拉熙春, "Qidan hengzhang kao: Jianlun zhang, gong, yuan zhi guanxi" 契丹横帐考—兼論帳、宮、院之關係 [A Study of the Hengzhang of Khitai: With a Discussion of a Relation among Zhang, Gong, and Yuan], in Aisin Gioro Ulhicun, *Aishin Gyoro Uru Hishun Joshin Kittan Kenkyū* 愛新覺羅烏拉熙春女真契丹学研究 [Jurchen and Kitan Studies of Aisin Gioro Ulhicun] (Kyoto: Shōkadō shoten, 2009), pp. 303-13, pp. 309-11.

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did not denote hierarchy but was simply a rhetoric highlighting the prominence of their royal identity.<sup>57</sup> But based on extant materials, while members of the Two Sectors may have been eligible to be of the “Horizontal Tent,” they may not be associated with the “qaghan” in question. The term qaghan in some cases seems to have a particular meaning, denoting the grandfather of Abaoji – Xuanzu Emperor, although he had never been a real qaghan. For instance, from the tomb inscription Yelü Renxian, we have the information that “All the brothers from the Three Patriarchal Households were the children of the qaghan.”<sup>58</sup> The “qaghan” in this context should have denoted Xuanzu, whose descent justified membership of the Three Patriarchal Households.

Closely connected to the above usage, the term “qaghan” seems to have been used to distinguish between different lineages within the Liao Yelü royal clan. When the term qaghan appears and when it comes to the issue of identifying a Yelü royal member, the term is normally associated with one of the Three Patriarchal Households of the royal clan. For instance, the writer of Yelü Dilie’s inscription from 1092, Yelü Gu, is indicated in the text as being of the “Third Patriarchal Household of the Horizontal Tent of the qaghan.”<sup>59</sup> The 1094 inscription written for Yelü Zhixian by Yelü Gu shows that Zhixian was of the “Second Patriarchal Household of the Horizontal Tent of the qaghan.”<sup>60</sup> In addition, in Zhixian’s tomb inscription we see the text also states: “Salade [...] Yilijin [...], Yilijin’s son was Xuanzu

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<sup>57</sup> Aisin Gioro, “Qidan hengzhang kao,” p. 310.

<sup>58</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 694.

<sup>59</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 145, 782.

<sup>60</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 799.

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Emperor. Xuanzu had three sons. The oldest was the King of Shu, Dinian. The second was the King of Sui, Shulan. The third was Dezu Emperor, the father of (Liao) Taizu Heavenly Golden Emperor (Abaoji). The present-day Three Patriarchal Households of the qaghan's Horizontal Tent [...].”<sup>61</sup> Members from the Three Patriarchal Households are not always presented along with the term qaghan. But as recorded in extant materials it seems that when “qaghan” is employed it is always associated with the membership of the Three Patriarchal Households.

In contrast, based on extant materials, we find no evidence showing that members of the Five and Six Divisions or those who were honorific Kitan are associated with “qaghan,” which seems to be because they did not belong to the lineage of “qaghan” – Xuanzu. For instance, in the 1099 inscription for Yel üNu, while Yel üNu is indicated to be of the Second Patriarchal Household of the qaghan's Horizontal Tent, the writer [Yel ü] Sijianu is simply designated to be of Jielineing Yuyue's clan of the Six Divisions, members of which were not descendants of Xuanzu.<sup>62</sup> The 1100 inscription for Yel üHongyong also identifies him as of Niaoguzhi Langjun's clan of the Six Divisions,<sup>63</sup> who, again, was not of Xuanzu's lineage and is not indicated by the term “qaghan.” This distinction seems to also apply to those who were not Kitan in origin but had been granted use of the Yel ü surname and the royal identity of one of the Three Patriarchal Households. The 1101 inscription for Yel ü(Han) Dilie identified Dilie

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<sup>61</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 158, 800-1. The connection between “qaghan” and the “First Patriarchal Household” can be also found in Yelü Guian's 1102 inscription. Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 225, 917.

<sup>62</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 178, 827.

<sup>63</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 261, 843.

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as being of the “Qin Prince’s lineage of the Horizontal Tent.” While he had been granted Liao royal identity as shown by “Horizontal Tent,” he was not of Xuanzu’s lineage. His foreign (Han) origin is partly reflected in the fragmented information in the following lines.<sup>64</sup> Thus within the Liao royal Yel ü clan, the term qaghan may have not been associated with the concept of Horizontal Tent but with the Three Patriarchal Households, and possibly excluded the Five and Six Divisions and those with external origins, even though they were incorporated into the Three Patriarchal Households. Of course, with more Kitan materials to be discovered in the future, we may have a more accurate understanding of the connotation of qaghan in the Liao dynasty.

Second, “qaghan” can be used to refer to rulers of the Xi people in the tenth century and possibly also in the eleventh century. As mentioned earlier, in the Liao dynasty “qaghan” was a divisible concept which can be employed to denote Liao and foreign (e.g. Song) monarchs. This principle was not confined to interstate context – within the realm under Liao authority, the leaders of tribal/nomadic powers should have also been permitted to hold the position of qaghan. For instance, Boluen ruled the Xi people as qaghan in the early tenth century and it was during his reign that the Xi were subjugated by Liao. According to scholars’ study, Boluen was allowed by Liao monarchs to retain his qaghanship and several of his successors also held the position.<sup>65</sup> Since the Liao military forces had subjugated many tribal groups in

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<sup>64</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 860. Other members from this family were interpreted in the same way. Earlier examples can be found in Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 689, 740.

<sup>65</sup> Aisin Gioro Ulhicun, *Kittan bun boshi yori mita Ryōshi* 契丹文墓誌より見た遼史 [Liao History in Kitan Inscriptions] (Kyoto: Shōkadō shoten, 2006), pp. 15, 26-27; Aisin Gioro Ulhicun, “Pingquan xian chutu ‘Liu jiedu guowang Yanning zhi furen Yel ü Yilimian muzhiming’ yanjiu” 平泉縣出土『六節度國

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the tenth and eleventh centuries, there might be more subordinate qaghans at the time. This means within Liao there was more than one qaghan – the Liao monarchs were qaghans, and they had subordinate qaghans.

In the Liao dynasty, we can also observe that many Liao elite or their families were identified by Xi qaghans' descent. For instance, as shown in the 1072 tomb inscriptions for Yel ü Renxian, his second daughter married a male who was of the “Boluen Qaghan's Tent.” Renxian's mother was of the “Xi Qaghan's Tent” and some of his other female relatives are also recorded to have married males of the “Xi Qaghan's Tent.”<sup>66</sup> In the 1094 Yel ü Zhixian's inscription the content also informs us that Zhixian's oldest sister married a male of the “Xi Qaghan's Tent.”<sup>67</sup> This employment of “Xi Qaghan's Tent” is common in extant Kitan materials. During the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries although the Xi leaders gradually lost their authority as qaghan because of the centralisation of power by the Liao court,<sup>68</sup> we can constantly observe the legacy of the Xi qaghanship when it came to

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王延寧之夫人耶律乙里婉墓誌銘』研究 [Studies of the “Tomb Inscription for Yel ü Yilimian, Wife of the King of the Six Military Governors” Discovered in Pingquan], <http://www.apu.ac.jp/~yoshim/D2.pdf>; Ren Aijun 任爱君, “Liaochao dui Xizu zhubu de zhengfu jiqi tongzhi fanglüe” 辽朝对奚族诸部的征服及其统治方略 [The Liao Conquest of Xi Tribes and Its Ruling Strategies], *Neimenggu shehui kexue* (2010: 2), pp. 37-41; Ma Hao 马昊, “Liaodai Xiwang jiqi quanli sangshi yanjiu” 辽代奚王及其权力丧失研究 [A Study of Xi Kings and Their Loss of Power in the Liao Dynasty] (Hebei University MA thesis, 2019).

<sup>66</sup> Ji Shi 即实, “‘Jiuling muzhi’ shidu” 《〈纥邻墓志〉释读》 [On the “Tomb Inscription of Jiuling”], in Ji Shi, *Milin wenjing: Qidan xiaozi jiedu xincheng* 谜林问径: 契丹小字解读新程 [Seeking a Path through the Forest of Riddles: New Progress of the Decipherment of the Kitan Small Script] (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 1996), pp. 201-60, p. 218. Aisin, *Kittan bun boshi yori mita Ryōshi*, p. 26. Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 101, 695.

<sup>67</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 160, 803.

<sup>68</sup> Ma, “Liaodai Xiwang jiqi quanli sangshi yanjiu,” pp. 45-57.

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identifying the descendants of Xi qaghans – such as Boluen, whose scions were indicated as belonging to the “Qaghan’s Tent” under his name.

Based on the above discussion we can tentatively conclude some features of the usage of the term qaghan in the Kitan language context during the Liao period. First, in its wider usage, similar to its traditional employment by nomads, it was a marker of the leading status of a person within a polity. Liao and Song emperors were qaghans, and rulers of the Kitan and Xi were qaghans. It was not an exclusive position in the Liao discourse, and could be applied to more than one person. Second, in its narrower usage, it seems to have functioned to differentiate the distance of relations and status between lineages within the Yel ü clan.

Xuanzu was recognised as a qaghan, and his descendants – the Three Patriarchal Households – can be marked through their connection to the (Xuanzu) qaghan.

So, alongside “qaghan” which was inherited from steppe traditions, what was the function of *huangdi* (emperor) in the Liao period? What were the differences between a qaghan and an emperor in the context of the Kitan language? The usage of “emperor” seems to be much narrower in scope, stricter in eligibility, and more universal in authority. In fact, on many occasions the term qaghan was not an effective vehicle to indicate hierarchical differences between supreme qaghans and their vassal qaghans. As shown by the above discussion, within the realm under Liao authority there were more than one qaghans. Leaders of the Kitan and Xi both had the position of qaghan. Besides, when denoting a historical monarch the term qaghan generated the same problem. For instance, the tomb inscription for Yel ü



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Zongjiao refers to the maternal grandfather of Zongjiao's mother as the "Noble Qan" of the Dan State (Bohai Kingdom). Although acting as *de facto* emperor at home, Bohai rulers had never publicly declared their emperorship; and in the Sinitic version of Zongjiao's tomb inscription the Bohai ruler in question is referred to as the "Sage King." As a consequence, the position of qaghan in fact made the Liao monarchs indistinguishable from other qaghans with lower position or lesser power, regardless of whether they were historical figures or those contemporary to Liao. However, while Liao monarchs held the position of qaghan, they concurrently bore the exclusive position of emperor *at home*. Therefore, in Kitan language the title/position of emperor distinguished the Liao supreme qaghans from other subordinate qaghans. It became the most superior position of the Liao monarchy, as a marker showing their incomparable authority over any other qaghans at home.

In the Liao period, the position of emperor was the defining element of the prestigious Liao monarchical identity. In particular, the regnal title which combined "emperor" and era-names, temple names, honorific titles or posthumously titles became the specific markers of Liao rulers. In contrast, "qaghan" seems to have been used as a general term/noun merely indicating Liao rulers' monarchical position rather than a proper imperial title. To be specific, in the so-called Inner Asian or Northern Asian history prior to the Liao imperial era, the regnal titles of nomadic rulers normally consisted of two major parts: "honorific prefixes" and the term "qaghan."<sup>69</sup> For instance, the first Turkic ruler held the title of Illig

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<sup>69</sup> Luo Xin, *Zhongguo beizhou minghao yanjiu*, p. 4; Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, p. 116.

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(State-possessing) Qaghan.<sup>70</sup> But in the Liao dynasty it seems that the term qaghan was no longer employed as part of the formal regnal title but instead used as a common term/noun. Thus we often see “qaghan” appears with numbers such as the “sixth qaghan” and the “two qaghans” or with an adjective such as “sage qan,” with “sage” to express respect rather than part of a formal regnal title.

However, in materials written in Kitan we see the combination of era-names/temple names/honorific titles/posthumous titles and the term emperor (*huangdi*) as the formal title employed to indicate the imperial identity of Liao monarchs. For instance, in the tomb inscription for the seventh Liao monarch, his title is “Xingzong, the Divine, Sage, Great, Filial and Bright Chongxi Emperor.”<sup>71</sup> In the above mentioned 1053 inscription for Yelü Zongjiao we see it states that “The grandfather of the prince was the Jingzong Emperor, the fifth qaghan of the Yelü clan,” in which the “fifth qaghan” was equivalent to say the “fifth ruler/monarch” in general and the specific identity of the Liao monarch was identified by “Jingzong Emperor” – Yelü Xian’s temple name and his position of emperor. There are many other examples. It is likely that in Kitan materials from the Liao dynasty “honorific prefixes (with Turkic language origin) + qaghan” which was used in pre-Liao especially Turkic traditions had been replaced by “honorific prefixes (with Sinic/Sinitic origin) + emperor (*huangdi*).”

Another difference between the title of emperor and the term qaghan was that the designation

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<sup>70</sup> Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, p. 116.

<sup>71</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 80-81, 672.

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of emperor, when combined with prefixed imperial designations such as era-names, temple names, or honorific titles, could be a rough identifying marker of time. That means, sometimes it held a rough equivalence to era-names as a way to indicate a period of reign. For instance, in the inscription for Yongqing Princess, it records that “During the era of the Heavenly Emperor, the Prime Minister Dinian. Aguzhi, the son of Jieli Langjun, [...]”<sup>72</sup> In the inscription for Yelü Nu, it says that the tomb owner’s great grandfather was enfeoffed as the Prince of Yan “during the era of the Son of Heaven Emperor.”<sup>73</sup> The above examples are in the small script, and in the Kitan large script we find similar examples. In the inscription for Yelü Xinie in 1114, it says “during the era of the Heavenly Emperor” and “during the era of the Son of Heaven Emperor,” which respectively refer to Abaoji and Deguang.<sup>74</sup> As can be observed from the above examples, when recording a time span it was roughly indicated not by the means of a precise time via Liao reign era-names but by referring to the honorific titles of Abaoji and Deguang. The temple name of an emperor was also used to indicate time. For instance, in Yelü Dielie’s inscription of 1092, the text mentions 銅鑒料, which means “during the time of Shengzong.”<sup>75</sup> The combination of era-name and the title of emperor was also an indicator of time. In the inscription for Xiao Temei’s wife, it mentions a time “during the era of Xingzong Chongxi Emperor.”<sup>76</sup> A similar usage is also found in the Kitan large script inscription for Duoluo liben Langjun: “during the era of Chongxi Emperor.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 811.

<sup>73</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 178, 828.

<sup>74</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 412, 570.

<sup>75</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 148, 786.

<sup>76</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 125, 747.

<sup>77</sup> Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, pp. 372, 534. As Liu Fengzhu has pointed out, using era-names to denote Liao emperors was a common practice in Kitan inscriptions.

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Xingzong was the seventh emperor of the Liao dynasty, and in fact he had employed two era-names – Jingfu<sup>78</sup> and Chongxi. It seems that when denoting emperors by their era-names, the name of either the first or the longest reign would be chosen. For instance, in the above case Chongxi was the second era-name of Xingzong Emperor and his first Jingfu was used for less than a year. The sixth Liao emperor Shengzong, when denoted by era-names, was referred to by his second and also the longest reign, Tonghe (983-1012),<sup>79</sup> although he had employed four in total. Another example is the *Eulogy for Empress Renyi* which was written in 1076, the second year of Dakang. Dakang was the third era-name of the reigning emperor Yel ü Hongji, preceded by his Qingning (1055-1064) and Xianyong (1065-1074), but the emperor was identified as Qingning Emperor in the inscription.

Thus, while qaghan was not used to indicate time, the title of emperor (*huangdi*) when combined with other imperial designations functioned like an era-name to indicate the timing. This difference between qaghan and emperor may suggest that the concept of temporal authority and methods for managing time (recording and naming) may have been understood in Liao primarily through the imperial traditions with Sinic origins, in which the position of emperor (not qaghan) was closely associated with the authority to issue calendars.

Of course, as for the recording and naming of time in Kitan language materials, the most common practice was a combination of twelfth zodiac animals and era-names. The era-names of each Liao emperor had its respective Kitan and Sinitic forms. Some Kitan era-names had

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<sup>78</sup> Jingfu has not been identified in the Kitan language. Kane, *The Kitan Language and Script*, p. 159.

<sup>79</sup> See, for instance, Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 813.

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closer correspondence with the Sinitic ones. Some were written in a way which reflected Kitan cultural features that were different from the Sinitic ones. For instance, all Kitan era-names starts with the letter 天 “heaven,” or 大 “great,” but not all era-names in Sinitic begins with the character meaning “heaven” or “great.”<sup>80</sup> Only the Sinitic era-names of Taiping and Da’an (both can be translated as Great Peace) and their Kitan forms seem to be a better match with one another. But the very employment of Liao era-names, whether written in Sinitic or Kitan, was inspired by a tradition of temporal authority rooted in the Han dynasty.

The above discussions tell us several points. While royal designations with Kitan native or Turkic origins were still retained and used, the Kitan elite had introduced a number of imperial designations modelled on Tang with much earlier Sinic origins, which played an important role in Liao imperial culture and even within the Kitan native language. Second, of the designations for Liao monarchs, qaghan was still widely used but mostly in context of discussing issues related to tribal organisations, or distinctions between lineages within the royal clan. In contrast, at home, the title/position of emperor took on the supreme position exclusively preserved for Liao imperial monarchs, and such a designation distinguished the nobility of the ruling Kitan qaghans from other lesser qaghans within the Liao realm. Based on extant materials, only monarchs of some foreign states (Song and possibly also Five Dynasties) appeared or were recognised in the Kitan language materials as emperor as well. Time was managed and recorded via designated reign era-names in both Sinitic and Kitan

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<sup>80</sup> Kane, *The Kitan Language and Script*, p. 158.

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forms and this was an integral part of the temporal authority of the Liao monarchs.

Considering the fact that the above imperial designations were used in the context of the Kitan native languages, employed for many Liao ruling elites, and used in private spaces (burial occasions), these designations with Sinic origins can be seen as an important defining factor of the Liao imperial tradition. Liao tomb inscriptions written in the Kitan language demonstrate an imperial culture largely inherited from Tang and earlier Sinic polities, and the related imperial designations were employed as the formal and the most important apparatus for representing the Liao imperial sovereignty on solemn occasions. Besides the tomb inscriptions written in both Sinitic and Kitan, in diplomatic correspondence between Liao and neighbouring states, mostly written in Sinitic, the imperial designations with Sinic origins signified a great level of superiority for the Liao monarchs as well. The employment of these imperial designations by the Liao ruling stratum thus closely mirrors the altered social and political context in the Eastern Eurasian continent since the middle of the ninth century, as discussed in the Introduction. Of course, with more Kitan materials to be discovered in the future, many of the above arguments may be modified. However, based on the extant materials it is clear that although cultural elements with steppe origins remained indispensable and were an integral part of the Liao imperial culture, those with Sinic origins were also introduced to a great extent and played a more important role in Liao society than they had for Liao steppe predecessors prior to the tenth century. The Liao monarchs were qaghans as well as emperors, and essentially the similarities and differences between the two positions were not ethnic issues and did not reflect an ethnic division between Han and

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non-Han. They were emperors of the Liao state and they were emperors of both their Han and non-Han subjects.

## **2. Dividing the imperial authority: new perceptions of monarchical sovereignty in the post-Tang world**

While many imperial designations with Sinic origins were indeed adopted, it is important to note that the Liao ruling elite employed them in new ways which deviated significantly from their pre-tenth century usage. As I have discussed elsewhere, in Eastern Eurasian history the period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries witnessed the emergence of a “divisible imperial authority.”<sup>81</sup> The following sections will further this argument and conduct a detailed examination of the different forms of this divisibility of imperial sovereignty. It will demonstrate some differences and similarities between Liao and its Sinic contemporaries in their perception of imperial authority, and interrogate the theory of sinicisation which has so far dominated the scholarly works on Liao imperial culture.

Since its adoption by Ying Zheng of Qin, the position of *huangdi* (emperor) had indicated incomparable superiority. Before the tenth century, although multiple claimants to the imperial throne might emerge when the central authority was collapsing, no one overtly acknowledged the effectiveness and legitimacy of multiple coexisting emperors. The related imperial designations were considered exclusive to one. In other words, at any given time

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<sup>81</sup> Chen Xue, “Age of Emperors.”

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there was only supposed to be one legal emperor, although claimants to the imperial throne might be multiple. But since the tenth century, the understanding of imperial sovereignty underwent significant changes, and on many occasions the imperial sovereignty and related imperial designations were perceived as divisible and shareable amongst multiple imperial claimants. An interstate order consisting of mutually recognised emperors gradually took shape.<sup>82</sup>

### **The position of emperor**

Since the tenth century, the divisibility of emperorship manifested itself in two different types. One featured an equality between emperors (equal emperors), and the other was characterised by a hierarchical difference between emperors (such as overlord-vassal emperors). The initiators of the “divisible imperial authority” were monarchs of Former Shu 前蜀 (907-925) and Later Liang, who concluded diplomatic parity and recognised one another as legitimate emperors.<sup>83</sup> In 907, Zhu Wen toppled the Tang Empire and declared himself emperor of Later Liang. But his imperial claim was refused by several other warlords. One of the contenders was the former Prince of Shu, Wang Jian 王建 (r. 907-918). Before Wang declared himself the emperor of Former Shu, he sent a letter to other warlords including the Prince of Jin, Li Keyong 李克用 (856-908), suggesting that Keyong and himself should “temporarily” declare their respective emperorship, in order to fight against Zhu Wen:

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<sup>82</sup> Xue, “Age of Emperors.”

<sup>83</sup> Xue, “Age of Emperors,” p. 56.



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[I] suggest both of us to accede to the imperial throne of our respective region. After we have eliminated Zhu Wen, we will invite a Tang royal member and restore him to the throne, and we return to the status of [Tang] vassals.<sup>84</sup>

Such a request indicated Wang's acceptance of another potential legal imperial claimant (Li Keyong) within the former Tang territory. Although Li Keyong refused this request, he did not challenge the basic idea proposed by Wang of having two mutually recognised emperors, simply expressing that he would remain loyal to the Tang house: "I have vowed that for my whole life I would not dare abandon my loyalty [to Tang]."<sup>85</sup> But several years later, Wang had changed his attitude towards Zhu Wen. In 912, Zhu sought to coexist with Wang through diplomatic parity, to which Wang gave a positive response.<sup>86</sup> In their diplomatic correspondence as recorded in the histories, they referred to one another as emperor, formally acknowledging their respective imperial authority, and treated one another as equals.<sup>87</sup> This mutual recognition of emperorship established by Later Liang and Former Shu was followed by Later Tang and Former Shu, and around a decade later by Later Jin and Later Shu 後蜀 (934-965).<sup>88</sup> In the eleventh century, the long-standing Liao-Song relationship also featured

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<sup>84</sup> Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 [Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governing] (1084; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 18:266.8675. 請各帝一方，俟朱溫既平，乃訪唐宗室立之，退歸藩服。For similar information, aslo see *JWDS*, 3:26.708.

<sup>85</sup> *Zizhi tongjian*, 18:266.8675. 誓於此生靡敢失節。Also see *JWDS*, 3:26.709. For discussions on Li Keyong, see Fan Wenli 樊文礼, *Li Keyong Pingzhuan* 李克用评传 [Biography of Li Keyong] (Jinan: Shandong daxue chubanshe, 2005).

<sup>86</sup> Wang Hongjie, *Power and Politics in Tenth-Century China: The Former Shu Regime* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2011), pp. 117, 235.

<sup>87</sup> Wang, *The Former Shu Regime*, pp. 114-23.

<sup>88</sup> Xue, "Age of Emperors," p. 56.

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diplomatic parity and the mutual recognition of imperial authority, although as we shall see later it followed a different precedent.

One key feature of this type of mutual recognition was that it was concluded based on a real or perceived power balance between different states, as a pragmatic and expedient way to survive in a multistate world.<sup>89</sup> The mutual recognition of emperorship was neither practised between all post-Tang regimes nor active at all times. For instance, while Former Shu monarchs were recognised as emperors by Later Liang since 912 and Later Tang in 924/5, and Later Shu monarchs as emperors by Later Jin in 936, the three northern China regimes did not recognise such imperial claims by rulers of other regimes emerged from the Tang Empire. They perceived Former Shu and Later Shu as possessing equal strength, with others not a direct threat or as having an inferior status undeserving of an imperial throne. Thus for the regimes within the former Tang districts, the recognition of another imperial claimant was normally selective and derived from pragmatism. Since the 950s onwards, Later Zhou and Northern Song had gained more in the military and economy areas in comparison with their predecessors in northern China and most other contemporary neighbours. Due to an increasing confidence within Zhou and Song with regard to recovering the previous Tang realm and claiming a universal rulership, there were no instances of mutual recognition of emperorship within the former Tang territories.<sup>90</sup>

The second type of divisibility of emperorship in the tenth century was demonstrated by

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<sup>89</sup> Xue, "Age of Emperors," p. 68.

<sup>90</sup> Xue, "Age of Emperors," p. 68.

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emperors in superior-inferior relationships. Within the former Tang territories, some post-Tang monarchs perceived the emperorship as not just divisible but also hierarchical – with superior emperors and inferior ones. But it should be noted that within the former Tang territories, such a perception was restricted to those post-Tang monarchs who possessed lesser military powers, whose justification to coexist with more powerful emperors was unilateral and was never reciprocally acknowledged. Nakanishi Asami provides a detailed discussion on the different forms of expressing “transmitting the [state] letter” (*zhishu* 致書), an expression which appears at the beginning of official diplomatic correspondence between monarchs. As he argues, “transmitting the letter,” which during Tang times was a form of expressing equality between monarchs,<sup>91</sup> in the post-Tang era was also applicable to communication between imperial rulers with unequal status.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, some of his arguments require modification. For instance, in the state letter sent from Later Shu to Later Zhou in 955 after Later Zhou conquered four Later Shu prefectures, it states at the beginning that: “The Great Shu Emperor is respectfully transmitting the [state] letter to His Majesty the Great Zhou Emperor.”<sup>93</sup> Possibly because Nakanishi does not examine the full content of the state letter,

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<sup>91</sup> On the cases in the Tang dynasty, see Nakamura Yūichi 中村裕一, *Zui Tō ougen no kenkyū* 隋唐王言の研究 [On the Imperial Rhetoric of Sui and Tang] (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2003), pp. 247-63.

<sup>92</sup> For instance, by combining the character 上, “submitting,” with “transmitting the letter,” or by concluding fictive kinship and emphasising seniority within the fictive relationship, the rhetoric which contains “transmitting the letter” could be used to indicate superiority-inferiority relations. Nakanishi Asami 中西朝美, “Godai Hokusō ni okeru kokusho no keishiki ni tsuite – *zhishu* bunsho no shiyō jōkyō o chūshin ni” 五代北宋における国書の形式について—「致書」文書の使用状況を中心に [On the Forms of State Letters during the Five Dynasties and Northern Song: With a Focus on the Expression of “Transmitting the Letter”], *Tōyōshi ronshū* 東洋史論集 33 (2005), pp. 93-110, pp. 94-102.

<sup>93</sup> Dong Gao 董誥 et al., *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 [A Complete Collection of Tang Literature Writing] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 129.1297. 大蜀皇帝謹致書於大周皇帝閣下。

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he makes a problematic claim that the letter presents Later Shu emperor Meng Chang 孟昶 (r. 934-965) and the Later Zhou emperor as equals.<sup>94</sup> While addressing the two monarchs as emperor, in the main text Meng Chang in fact adopts a humble manner, denoting Later Shu as an “inferior state” 下國 and refers to himself only by his given name of Chang. In contrast, he respectfully calls Later Zhou a “Grand Dynasty” 大朝 and refers to its monarch as “Emperor” without mentioning his name. Chang expresses great gratitude to the Later Zhou emperor for having returned some captives and treating them well after Zhou captured four Shu prefectures, and conveys his anticipations for the rebuilding of friendly relations between the two states.<sup>95</sup> As observed, the Later Shu understood the imperial position divisible but also hierarchical.

Another example is that in 956 the Southern Tang 南唐 (937-975) monarch Li Jing 李璟 (r. 916-961) sent a state letter to Later Zhou, which reads as follows:

The Tang Emperor is presenting the [state] letter to the Great Zhou Emperor: [We] request to end wars and conclude amity. [I] am willing to treat Your Majesty as my elder brother, and to offer annual payment to supply your military costs.<sup>96</sup>

Nakanishi argues that although in rhetoric “presenting the letter” (*fengshu* 奉書) expresses an attitude slightly humbler than “transmitting the letter” (*zhishu* 致書), it remains an alternative

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<sup>94</sup> Nakanishi, “Godai Hokusō ni okeru kokusho no keishiki ni tsuite,” p. 101.

<sup>95</sup> Dong, *Quan Tang wen*, 129.1297.

<sup>96</sup> *JWDS*, 9:116.3596. 唐皇帝奉書大周皇帝：請息兵修好，兄事周主，願歲輸貨財，補助軍需。

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way to say “transmitting the letter.” He further points out that in 958 Southern Tang had altered the form of the diplomatic document sent to Later Zhou, from a state letter to a “record” (*biao* 表).<sup>97</sup> He does not provide further comment on the usage of “emperor” but his discussion gives the impression that the 956 Southern Tang letter has presented Li Jing and the Later Zhou ruler as political equals.<sup>98</sup> However, the historical backdrop to the 956 letter was that Southern Tang had experienced a great defeat by Later Zhou forces a year before. Within this context, we can observe that Li Jing in fact presents his status as lower than that of the Later Zhou emperor. He gives the name of his state simply as Tang without “Great,” but employs “Great” to denote Later Zhou. He also shows willingness to conduct a fictive kinship in which Later Zhou emperor would receive a senior status. The offer of annual payment further indicates the disadvantageous position of Southern Tang after the great defeat. Therefore, this state letter in my view expresses the inferior status of Southern Tang monarch, as perceived by Li Jing. Again, the imperial position in Southern Tang emperor’s eyes was not only shareable with another emperor, but could also be hierarchical in order to accommodate senior and inferior emperors.

The above information is mostly recorded in the *JWDS*. But these recordings of imperial designations assumed by regional contenders of the Five Dynasties do not indicate Song historians’ recognition of their legitimacy and imperial claims. These designations are often retained in cases that historians considered to be historical facts, such as who in which year declared himself emperor. This type of recording seems to function as a warning as well as a

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<sup>97</sup> *Biao* is a form of document presented from a subordinate to a superior.

<sup>98</sup> Nakanishi, “Godai Hokusō ni okeru kokusho no keishiki ni tsuite,” p. 101.

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demonstration of the bold and unacceptable actions committed by the “usurpers,” information of which is preserved in forms such as their investiture or abdication edicts, and conversations or expressions found in diplomatic documents. Denial of the legitimacy of “usurpers” usually happens when historians offer a statement or comment on these events, through the use of derogatory language, such as 偽 (*wei* usurpers), 寇 (*kou* bandits) and 僭號 (*jianhao*, to usurp the imperial position). For instance, the *JWDS* preserves an edict issued by the Wu 吳 (902-937) general Xu Zhigao 徐知誥 (later Li Bian 李昇, r. 937-943) to invest the former Wu emperor Yang Pu 楊溥 (r. 920-937) as *ranghuang* (讓皇 Abdicated Emperor), in which the *JWDS* retains the edict’s wording of *huangdi* to refer to Yang Pu.<sup>99</sup> Meanwhile, in general statements concerning the history of Wu and Southern Tang, Song historians usually simply refer to their rulers by personal names, and their regimes as *wei Wu* 偽吳 (the usurper Wu), *Huai kou* 淮寇 (bandits of the Huai River region) or *Huai yi* 淮夷 (barbarians of the Huai River region).<sup>100</sup>

Information concerning the imperial designations of rulers deemed to be illegitimate, and the mutual recognition of emperorship between the Five Dynasties and their neighbours, once preserved in Song official histories, seems to mirror the terminology used at the time by the Five Dynasties and their neighbours. Although the “false” imperial claims were implausible by Song times, they were not edited out by Song historians. For instance, some of the above examples are recorded in the *JWDS*, which was compiled by Song official scholars based on

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<sup>99</sup> *JWDS*, 11:134.4167.

<sup>100</sup> Many such examples can be found in the annals of the *JWDS*.

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Five Dynasties sources, who saw any imperial claimants other than Five Dynasties and Song emperors as illegal usurpers. Thus if the neighbouring monarchs of the Five Dynasties and Song did not assume the imperial position, there was no need for Song historians to retrospectively re-grant these “usurpers” the imperial title of emperor. There are various possible reasons for this, such as carelessness when transmitting earlier texts or to provide a warning via showing the false ambitions of the usurpers. Song historians would not have coined the mutual recognition of emperorship, which would without doubt raise questions over the perceived incomparable superiority of the position of emperor during the early Song period, thus by extension undermining Song universal authority.

The above discussion underscores that the very ideology of that there *should* be only one emperor at any given time had already changed within former Tang territories. Instead, for some post-Tang monarchs, relationships between emperors could be either equal or hierarchical.<sup>101</sup> But it is worth noting that the relationships between mutually recognised imperial powers were concluded based on the factual or perceived power balance. Emperors whose territory was in a disadvantaged situation normally unilaterally recognised coexistence with those with stronger power. But the superior side never acknowledged the legitimacy of imperial claimants they deemed inferior or unthreatening. The phenomenon thus mirrors both the emergence of new changes to the perception of imperial authority, and strong traditions which were obsessed with the exclusiveness of imperial designations.

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<sup>101</sup> Xue, “Age of Emperors.”

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## **Emperorship during the Liao dynasty**

As mentioned above, the Liao dynasty had introduced and employed many imperial designations derived from Sinic traditions. Just like many of their tenth-century southern counterparts, the Liao elite at the time perceived the imperial authority as something that could be held simultaneously by other imperial claimants. However, the Liao understanding of the divisibility of imperial sovereignty and related designations with Sinic origins were mostly derived from the steppe tradition of divisible qaghanship, and the interstate relationships involving Liao had demonstrated a different pattern to those conducted between regimes born from the former Tang territories. Generally possessing superiority, some Liao emperors had invested vassal emperors, and became an important force in maintaining an order of dual/multi-emperors.<sup>102</sup>

### ***The mutual recognition of emperorship***

One instance is that the second Liao emperor Deguang had overtly acknowledged the emperorship of Shi Jingtang, the previous Later Tang military governor of Hedong who had rebelled against the Later Tang court in 936. Upon Shi Jingtang's request, Deguang led a large army in person to provide Shi Jingtang with military assistance, defeating the forces besieging Shi Jingtang which had been dispatched by the Later Tang court. At Shi Jingtang's base, Taiyuan 太原, in the presence of the Liao forces and the supporters of Shi Jingtang, Deguang, who in his imperial edict appears as the Emperor of the Great Kitan, appointed Shi Jingtang

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<sup>102</sup> Xue, "Age of Emperors," pp. 69-70.



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as the emperor of the newly established Later Jin state. Through this investiture ritual, Shi Jingtang became a vassal emperor of Deguang within an interstate hierarchy.<sup>103</sup>

The mutual recognition of emperorship between Deguang and Shi Jingtang was merely a start, after which similar practices frequently took place between Liao and its neighbours. For instance, in 951 the remnants of Later Han dynasty rebuilt the Han house and confronted Later Zhou (and subsequently Northern Song) in Hedong. The Liao emperor invested Liu Chong 劉崇 (r. 951-954) as the Divine and Martial Emperor of Great Han 大漢神武皇帝, who in return acted as the subordinate of the Liao ruler. The superior-subordinate relationship between the emperors of the two states continued for around two decades, until the Northern Song force destroyed Northern Han completely in 979.<sup>104</sup>

As discussed, before the tenth century it was normally unacceptable that in interstate context an emperor would recognise the coexistence of another imperial claimant. Even after the collapse of Tang, within its former realm it remained unusual to see cases resembling the Liao-Later Jin relationship, in which an emperor with absolute advantage invested and recognised a vassal emperor. Therefore, first it is necessary to establish from which sources

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<sup>103</sup> Xue, “Age of Emperors,” pp. 60-67.

<sup>104</sup> On the Liao-Northern Han relationship, see Li Peng 李鹏, “Da Liao yu Bei Han lianmeng guanxi tanxi” 大辽与北汉联盟关系探析 [On the Alliance between Liao and Northern Han], *Neimenggu shehui kexue* (Hanwen ban) 内蒙古社会科学 (汉文版) 34.1 (2013), pp. 45-48; Mori Eisuke, “Sakuhōsuru kōtei to sakuhō sa reru kōtei: Kittan (Ryō) kōtei to HokuKan kōtei no jirei kara” 冊封する皇帝と冊封される皇帝--契丹 (遼) 皇帝と北漢皇帝の事例から [The Emperors Who Invested Others and the Emperors Who Were Invested: A Case Study of the Kitan Liao and Northern Han Emperors], *Kansai daigaku tōzai gakujutsu kenkyūjo kiyō* 関西大学東西学術研究所紀要 46 (2013), pp. 213-28.

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the information on this mutual acknowledgement between Deguang and Shi Jingtang is extracted, and to what extent they can be taken as evidence. This is a crucial issue which many historians have overlooked.

### ***Shi Jingtang's acknowledgement of Deguang as emperor***

The direct contemporary evidence can be dated to 942 and comes from Dunhuang manuscripts (S4473) in the form of a posthumous letter sent in the tone of Shi Jingtang to Deguang, although it might be written under the order of the second Later Jin emperor and only in the name of Shi Jingtang.<sup>105</sup> At the very beginning, it states that: “The Emperor of Great Jin is respectfully transmitting the posthumous letter to the Emperor of the Northern Dynasty 大晉皇帝謹致遺書於北朝皇帝足下,” and the references to Deguang as emperor (*huangdi* 皇帝) again appear in the rest of the content.<sup>106</sup> Although as Lien-Sheng Yang has proposed, there was a possibility that the letter had not been sent to Liao,<sup>107</sup> it shows that in the Later Jin court the Liao monarch was recognised as another holder of the position of emperor.

Other information is collected in two early Song official sources, the *JWDS* and *CFYG*. For instance, according to *JWDS*'s accounts, after Deguang led his army to cross the northern

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<sup>105</sup> For the letter and a discussion on its rhetoric and content, see Lien-Sheng Yang, “A ‘Posthumous Letter’ from the Chin Emperor to the Khitan Emperor in 942,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10.3/4 (1947), pp. 418-28.

<sup>106</sup> Yang, “A ‘Posthumous Letter’,” p. 419.

<sup>107</sup> Yang, “A ‘Posthumous Letter’,” p. 427.

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border of Later Tang, Jingtang sent Deguang a message which already referred to Deguang as emperor, requesting Liao armies not to engage with Later Tang forces: “If the emperor comes to alleviate these hardships, then we shall succeed. Enemy morale is high, but if we meet tomorrow morning to formulate a plan, it may not be too late.”<sup>108</sup> One more issue concerning the *JWDS* in particular, is that as commonly known the *JWDS* is a recompilation by a Qing historian Shao Jinhan 邵晉涵 (1743-1796), primarily from *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典. During Qianlong’s reign, Shao changed some wording of the *JWDS* to avoid offence to Manchu rulers, the changed were mainly restricted to words relevant to those concerning origins or ethnicities, such as changing of the Song wording of *beilu* (northern caityfs) to *Qidan* (Kitan).<sup>109</sup> Moreover, Shao Jinhan conducted his work in Historiographical Office after 1771, but already in 1768 Qing court officials had completed a historical work named *Yupi lidai tongjian jilan* 御批歷代通鑒輯覽, under the order of Qianlong Emperor.<sup>110</sup> The Qing official discourse demonstrated by this compilation treated the Liao and Five Dynasties as non-legitimate regimes, and employed *zhu* (ruler 主) rather than *huangdi* (emperor) to refer to their rulers. Therefore, if the *JWDS* which Shao Jinhan had edited had originally recorded Deguang’s title as, for instance, *qaghan*, *zhu* (ruler), or *wang* (king), all of which in hierarchy were lower than the position of emperor, there is no need for him who undertook

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<sup>108</sup> *JWDS*, 7:75.2272.

<sup>109</sup> Chen Yuan 陈垣, “*Jiu Wudai shi fafu*” 旧五代史辑本发覆 [On the Recompilation of the *Old History of the Five Dynasties*], in Liu Naihe 刘乃和 (ed.), *Zhongguo xiandai xueshu jingdian, Chen Yuan juan* 《中国现代学术经典 陈垣卷》 [Scholarly Classics of Modern China: Chen Yuan] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), pp. 445-90.

<sup>110</sup> *Yupi lidai tongjian jilan* 御批歷代通鑒輯覽 [Compilation of *Comprehensive Mirrors of All Previous Dynasties*, with Imperial Comments], in *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 [The Complete Library of the Four Treasures].

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official recompilation of *JWDS* to particularly alter it to the most superior title emperor to legitimise the Liao rulers, which would risk challenging the official discourse of the Qing court.

The *CFYG* is an encyclopedic work completed in 1013 and primarily on the history before Song, and when the Song court ordered historians to compile *CFYG*, one major principle was to retain what sources had said without contemporary interference of materials.<sup>111</sup> Although it is not clear to what extent historians adhered to this principle, I will show that the passages with which we are concerned – Jingtang’s acknowledgement of Deguang’s emperorship – must be authentic transcriptions of original materials. According to the records of *CFYG*, two days after Deguang invested Jingtang in Jinyang city, as the new emperor Jingtang issued an imperial edict of his own, which aimed to announce and justify his enthronement from his perspective. In the edict, Jingtang attributed his survival and his enthronement to Deguang, stating:

The Kitan emperor did not forget the tight relationship between our forbears. He personally led robust troops from a great distance to destroy the wicked, and swept out all the evil enemies despite not having adequate time to prepare his army. Then seeing that the Central Plains were in need of a master, and being sympathetic about the chaos

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<sup>111</sup> On the principles, see Liu Naihe 刘乃和, “Xu” 序 [Preface], in Liu Naihe 刘乃和 (ed.) *Cefu yuangui xintan* 册府元龟新探 [New Reflections on the *Cefu yuangui*] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou shuhuashe, 1983), pp. 1-28; Wang Chun 王纯, “Song Zhenzong yu *Cefu yuangui*” 宋真宗与《册府元龟》 [Song Zhenzong and *Cefu yuangui*], *Henan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 河南大学学报 (社会科学版) 33.1 (1993), pp.109-10.

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of our land, [the emperor therefore] met the demand of the masses and invested me as the new ruler.<sup>112</sup>

This edict was issued when Deguang was still at Jinyang, before the alliance destroyed the Later Tang force totally. However, Jingtang was not referring to Deguang as emperor and complimenting his assistance merely because Deguang was present at the time. After Jingtang entered Luoyang, the capital of Later Tang, without Deguang's company he issued another imperial edict, again singling out Deguang's crucial help to him:

Throughout history, the wisdom of the emperor of Northern Dynasty is the most brilliant; nowadays, his martial magnificence surpasses all. He was sympathetic to my unjustified treatment and difficulties, and so destroyed all the wicked and made the opponent's armies capitulate. Only by relying on his magnificent exploits, could I build today's great enterprise.<sup>113</sup>

As we can observe, the contents of the edicts contained some similar wording and phrases to those issued by Deguang in Jingtang's investiture ritual, which suggests Jingtang borrowed from it some expressions. In the two edicts Jingtang acknowledged Deguang as his patron, resonating with Deguang's rhetoric on his indispensable role in Jingtang's enthronement. As

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<sup>112</sup> *CFYG*, 2:93.1026. 契丹皇帝不忘先朝，特存舊好，親提銳旅，遠殄群兇，未整鸛鵒，盡殲蛇豕。而復念中原之無主，憫四海之倒懸，欲泰群情，特申大義。

<sup>113</sup> *CFYG*, 2:93.1027. 而遇北朝皇帝英明鑒古，威武冠今，嫉彼不平，閔予多難，遂致累殲兇寇，繼納降兵，每借巨功，俾成大業。

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the inferior, it seems that Jingtang had no choice but to recognize Deguang as another holder of the imperial position - “Kitan emperor” (*Qidan huangdi* 契丹皇帝) and “the emperor of the Northern Dynasty” (*Beichao huangdi* 北朝皇帝).

Although these materials have been preserved in works compiled after 936, Jingtang’s references to Deguang as emperor seem to be original without alteration of historians when collected in Five Dynasties’ documents and then in Northern Song compilations. *Huangdi*, or emperor, was the most superior title designated for rulers. Therefore if Jingtang referred to Deguang as holding a title other than emperor, such as *qaghan*, there is no reason for the historians of the Five Dynasties or Song to deliberately alter it into *huangdi*. Besides, in sections such as Memoir of Kitan in both *Wudai huiyao* and *JWDS*, their writers recorded events such as Abaoji’s declaration of himself as emperor, Deguang’s succession to the imperial throne, and his proclamation of reign-era names.<sup>114</sup> This indicates that, although in their own writings Five Dynasties or Song historians usually employed degraded wording such as “usurper” (*jian* 僭) or “northern caitiffs” (*beilu* 北虜) to describe Liao emperors, they were well aware and informed of the events taking place in Liao and did not deny there were self-declared imperial rulers to their north. Therefore it seems that historians faithfully transcribed original texts – Jingtang’s edicts and conversations - in their works without alteration. They had no incentive or imperative to justify Deguang as another emperor if the original sources did not record him as such, indeed to do so would risk undermining the legitimacy of Later Jin, one of the legitimate regimes recognized in *JWDS* and *CFYG* as

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<sup>114</sup> *JWDS*, 11:137.4271-311; Wang Pu 王溥, *Wudai huiyao* 五代會要 [Institutional History of the Five Dynasties] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 29.455-62.

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having passed the Heavenly Mandate onto Song. And even if we did not have the evidence mentioned above, given the fact that Jingtang was subordinate to Deguang, to acknowledge Deguang as another emperor was the only choice he could make in their relationship.

### ***Deguang's acknowledgement of Shi Jingtang as emperor***

Liao domestic materials have preserved information about Deguang's acknowledgement of Jingtang as emperor. Liao history suffers a dearth of written sources of its own, but recent archaeological finds will be helpful. A Liao tomb inscription written in 970 refers to Deguang as *sisheng huangdi* 嗣圣皇帝, literally "the emperor succeeding the sage,"<sup>115</sup> and states that he had once accompanied "the new emperor of the Great Jin" (*Da Jin zhi xindi* 大晉之新帝).<sup>116</sup> We also see evidence from a Liao tomb inscription written in 974 for the former second Later Jin emperor Shi Chonggui, during whose reign a four-year war between Liao and Later Jin broke out. Chonggui was taken captive by Deguang in 947 and died in Liao in 974. In the lid to his tomb inscription Chonggui's title is inscribed as the Deceased Jin Prince of the Great Kitan State (*Da Qidan guo gu Jin wang* 大契丹國故晉王) and is also referred as Prince (*wang* 王) in the text of inscription.<sup>117</sup> But the text indicates that Chonggui acceded to the emperor position as successor of Jingtang when he passed away.<sup>118</sup> The

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<sup>115</sup> The "sage" refers to Deguang's father Abaoji.

<sup>116</sup> "Geng Chongmei muzhi" 耿崇美墓誌, in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, p. 13.

<sup>117</sup> Qi Wei 齐伟, "Liaoning sheng bowuguan cang 'Shi Chonggui muzhiming' kaoshi" 辽宁省博物馆藏《石重贵墓志铭》考释 [On the "Tomb Inscription for Shi Chonggui" of the Liaoning Provincial Museum], *Liao Jin lishi yu kaogu* 辽金历史与考古 4 (2013), pp. 299-304, pp. 300, 303-4.

<sup>118</sup> Qi, "Shi Chonggui muzhiming," pp. 300, 303.

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inscription also directly narrates that Jingtang's investiture was an occasion where one emperor invested another: "The Great Kitan *sisheng huangdi* eliminated great difficulties to invest him (Shi Jingtang) as emperor in the *Zhongxia* (Central Kingdom)." <sup>119</sup> Though these inscriptions were written later than Jingtang's investiture, they must have followed the custom of referring to Jingtang as emperor by Deguang in 936. Since Jingtang was in fact a ruler subordinate to Deguang, if Deguang did not recognize him as emperor there would be no need for Liao interpretations to retrospectively elevate inferior Jingtang to an emperor position so long after the demise of Later Jin. Moreover, the text of Chonggui's inscription narrates his demotion from imperial status, with his own designated reign era-name, to a degraded princely title after capture, mirroring his changing status as successor to a previously enthroned emperor. <sup>120</sup> This evidence, from the Liao side, tells us that the imperial positions of both Jingtang and Deguang were well known in Liao; its recording was permitted, and its validity long-lasting.

There are also some earlier but not very direct pieces of evidence. In 947, Shi Chonggui's mother – a concubine of Jingtang, and Jingtang's empress were also taken to Liao. They died there in 949 and 950 respectively and were both buried in 951. In their tomb inscriptions they were referred to as *taifei* 太妃, Great Consort, and *taihou* 太后, Empress Dowager, respectively. <sup>121</sup> This indicates a Liao recognition of the existence of imperial designation in

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<sup>119</sup> Qi, "Shi Chonggui muzhiming," pp. 300, 303. 大契丹嗣聖皇帝排大難而帝之於中夏.

<sup>120</sup> Qi, "Shi Chonggui muzhiming," pp. 300, 304.

<sup>121</sup> Du Xiaohong 杜晓红 and Li Yufeng 李玉峰, "Liaoning Chaoyang xian faxian Liaodai Houjin Li Taihou, An Taifei muzhi" 辽宁朝阳县发现辽代后晋李太后李太后、安太妃墓志 [Discovery of the Tomb Inscriptions of Liao-Later Jin's Li Empress Dowager and An Grand Concubine], *Bianjiang kaogu*



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Later Jin, and implies that Jingtang was invested as an emperor by Deguang rather than any position else in earlier time. The official history of Liao, *Liao shi* 遼史, though compiled in the mid-fourteenth century under Yuan (1271-1368), primarily based its sources on documents such as Veritable Records from the Liao period.<sup>122</sup> The account provided in the *LS* is identical to the information from tomb inscriptions: that Deguang had invested Jingtang as the “Great Jin Emperor” (*Da Jin huangdi* 大晉皇帝).<sup>123</sup>

There was an important premise for Liao to maintain this new type of diplomacy, besides its military strength. That is, when interacting with their neighbours with Sinic origins or greatly influenced by Sinic traditions, Liao had adopted *huangdi* as the highest position designated for its rulers. This guaranteed that the diplomatic interactions, for instance the “language” employed and exchanged, between Liao and its southern neighbors were conducted within a similar “cultural context.” As Franke puts it, “the partner had to be a state (*kuo*) with institutions that paralleled those of the Sung.”<sup>124</sup> It suggests to us that a well-understood and effective diplomatic communication could only be conducted between two regimes whose institutional designations were “homogeneous enough.” I argue that the difference in the institutional language employed (*huangdi* vs. *qaghan*) could commute the factual parity into an inegalitarian order in rhetoric, somewhat protecting the superiority of emperor, leaving it

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*yanjiu* 边疆考古研究 16.2 (2014), pp. 61-68, pp. 62-63.

<sup>122</sup> Feng Jiasheng 馮家昇, *Liao shi yuanliu kao yu Liao shi chujiao* 遼史源流考與遼史初校 [The Sources of the *Liao shi* and Preliminary Annotations of *Liao shi*] (Beiping: Hafo Yanjing xueshe, 1933).

<sup>123</sup> *LS*, 1:3.39.

<sup>124</sup> Herbert Franke, “Sung Embassies: Some General Observations,” in *China Among Equals*, pp. 116-48, p. 141.

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unchallenged. To be specific, in Sinitic historiography the place of qaghan in the steppe political structure was interpreted as equivalent to that of *huangdi* in the political hierarchy of Sinic empires.<sup>125</sup> But in practices of north China based regimes, even if a qaghan had been recognized as a diplomatic equal to the emperor, in an interstate context he was still considered inferior to an emperor, simply because diplomacy was conducted by those of different institutional and cultural contexts, and in rhetoric the positions other than emperor were interpreted as inferior. For instance, the Tang Taizong emperor Li Shimin claimed that the “Heavenly Qaghan” title presented to him by northern nomads was a position lower than that of the “Son of Heaven,” an alternative concept of emperor in usage since the Han dynasty. Thus his title recorded in edicts to northern nomads was “Emperor · Heavenly Qaghan” (*huangdi tian kehan* 皇帝·天可汗), with Emperor preceding Qaghan to indicate which was the superior of the two.<sup>126</sup> A Later Zhou emperor had also once denied Southern Tang ruler’s self-reference as emperor and addressed him as *guozhu* (國主 state ruler), a lower title which the Zhou emperor in his reply considered equivalent to *qaghan*.<sup>127</sup>

However, the interactions between Liao rulers and their southern neighbors were between two mutually recognized emperors of similar bureaucratic and institutional structures.

Although Liao rulers in records of the Five Dynasties and Song had been denigrated as barbarians, their claimed position – emperor – cannot be interpreted as inferior to any other

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<sup>125</sup> Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Bei shi* 北史 [Book of the North] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 10:98.3251.

<sup>126</sup> On this point, see Zhu, “Tangdai ‘*huangdi · tian kehan*’ shiyi,” pp. 423-27.

<sup>127</sup> Yamazaki Yoshihiro 山崎覺士, *Chūgoku Godai Kokka Ron* 中国五代国家論 [Chinese World Order in the Five Dynasties Era] (Kyoto: Shibunkaku shuppan, 2011), p. 138.

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positions. While images of Liao rulers, their state, history or the people they ruled, could be denigrated in the writing of historical sources, the supremacy of the claimed institutional position – emperor, and its philosophical basis could not be denied. Once diplomatic parity was agreed between two emperors, rather than between an emperor and, for instance, a *qaghan*, the indivisible and unshareable nature of emperorship faced a direct challenge.

### **Reign era-names**

The power of recording time, as mentioned above, was another important aspect of imperial authority. Since the tenth century, the perception of this authority also changed along with that of emperorship, which treated the power to name and record the year via reign era-names as something that could be held simultaneously by other emperors. There is no documented mutual recognition of era-names between monarchs before the tenth century, although an example of unilateral recognition of two era-names does appear in an early ninth century treaty between the Tang and Tibetan empires via which they ended their long lasting confrontation. This Tang-Tibet covenant, known as *Changqing huimeng* 長慶會盟, was first concluded in 821 at the Tang capital Chang'an, and again in 822 at Lhasa in Tibet. Several documents have been transmitted, with one Sinitic text preserved in Sinitic materials such as *Jiu Tang shu* and *Cefu yuangui*, and the others written either in Tibetan or bilingually in Sinitic and Tibetan on the four sides of a stele erected in Lhasa.<sup>128</sup>

In the east side of the stele, the text was entirely in Tibetan. It gave three dates: two for the

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<sup>128</sup> Pan, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan*, p. 145.

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conclusions of the two covenants, and one for the erection of the inscribed stele. The three dates were recorded by possibly the only reign era-name of the Tibetan Empire - skyid rtag, and by the corresponding Tang era-name of Changqing.<sup>129</sup> But the Tibetan era-name seems to be a temporary coinage in order to assign a corresponding designation to that of Tang.<sup>130</sup> If this scholarly view is correct, it suggests that at the time the Tibetan elite may have not been fully aware of the significance and exclusiveness of era-names in symbolising imperial authority. In the Sinitic text of the covenant we in fact find no record of the Tibetan era-name, and the sworn text is exclusively recorded via the Tang designation of Changqing. This suggests that for the Tang elite, the era-name was indivisible, preserved only for the true imperial ruler. There was no mutual recognition of temporal authority between Tang and Tibetan monarchs.

Regimes within the former Tang territories in the tenth century offer no evidence of the divisible temporal authority either. This is largely because the transmitted texts are normally short excerpts from the original versions, which carry no indicator of how the time was recorded and named. But considering the mutual recognition of the emperorship discussed earlier, and the fact that in most cases each such emperor had declared his own era-name, it is reasonable to suggest that in diplomatic correspondence they might have employed their

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<sup>129</sup> Fang-Kuei Li 李方桂, "The Inscription of the Sino-Tibetan Treaty of 821-822," *T'oung Pao* Second Series, 44. 1/3 (1956), p. 4.

<sup>130</sup> Drolgar 卓嘎, "‘Tang-Bo huimeng bei’ beidi jinian fangshi yanjiu zongshu ji Tubo shiqi Zangzu jinian fangshi kaozheng" 《唐蕃会盟碑》碑底纪年方式研究综述及吐蕃时期藏族纪年方式考证 [A Review of Chronologies on the Bottom of the "Tang-Tubo Alliance Monument" and Textual Evidence for Chronologies of the Tubo Period], *Xizang yanjiu* 西藏研究 (2014:5), pp. 115-20, p. 116.

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respective era-names at the beginning or the ending sections of their letters.

Most extant evidence comes from diplomatic correspondence involving Liao and its southern neighbours, which pays witness to several new changes concerning the perception of temporal authority. As mentioned, before the tenth century, within an interstate hierarchy a vassal state was expected to employ the era-names of its suzerain state, both at home and on diplomatic occasions, as an indicator of its acceptance of the suzerain's temporal and thus imperial authority. Although in some cases a vassal state may have employed a self-designated era-name at home, this was for internal consumption and was not supposed to be public and known to its external suzerain.

However, the investiture ritual of Shi Jingtang in 936 was unusual in several ways. Normally, when the monarch of a new dynasty acceded to the throne, depending on the context he could choose to change, or continue to use the era-name of the dynasty he replaced. As discussed elsewhere, the edict investing Shi Jingtang was issued under the era-name of Liao – the ninth year of Tianxian, which meant the cosmological and temporal order within which Shi Jingtang received his legitimacy was that of Liao.<sup>131</sup> However, contradictory to this temporal order, by virtue of the investiture ritual Shi Jingtang was to succeed, as invested by Deguang, the Later Tang emperors as the new ruler of north China rather than those of Liao. In the first imperial edict issued by Shi Jingtang after his ascension to the throne, he declares that “[Now

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<sup>131</sup> See discussions in my thesis, Chen Xue, “The Liao World Order and Its Interpretations in Northern Song Histories – A Case Study of the Liao-Later Jin Relationships between 936 and 942” (University of Birmingham MRes thesis, 2015), pp. 38-40.

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we] should change the seventh year of Changxing to the inaugural year of Tianfu.”<sup>132</sup>

Changxing was the era-name of the Later Tang Mingzong 明宗 Emperor (r. 926-933) and had in fact only been in place for four years. Mingzong’s successors, Mindi 閔帝 (r. 934) and Modi 末帝 (934-937) emperors, had respectively employed Yingshun 應順 and Qingtai 清泰, which together had lasted for three years. Shi Jingtang’s imperial edict thus denied the temporal authority of the short-lived previous two emperors of Later Tang, and treated his own imperial power as being directly in succession to Mingzong.

This thus presents a “chaotic” temporal order for the imperial succession in northern China in 936: the Later Tang dynasty which Shi Jingtang claimed to succeed and from which he was supposed to acquire his legitimacy had never bestowed such imperial power to him; rather, he acceded to the throne and received the Mandate of Heaven within a temporal authority of Liao, a dynasty which Shi Jingtang did not replace. Thus it was initially under the temporal order of a third party (Liao) that the Later Jin emperor replaced Later Tang.<sup>133</sup> In short, the event indicates that two different temporal authorities coexisted at the time Later Jin was established, with that of Later Jin to replace that of Later Tang, and that of Liao from which Later Jin acquired its legitimacy to rule north China.

In contrast to pre-existing traditions, as a vassal of Deguang, Shi Jingtang could independently practice his imperial power of naming time. The imperial edict and his era-name of Tianfu were issued in the name of Later Jin emperor and demonstrated his own

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<sup>132</sup> *CFYG*, 2:93.1026

<sup>133</sup> Xue, “The Liao World Order,” pp. 39-40.

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temporal authority. It was public and known to the Liao side, because Deguang and Liao armies were still present and stationed at Jinyang (Taiyuan) when it was promulgated.<sup>134</sup> While Shi Jingtang could not of course deny the temporal authority of Deguang, Deguang as his overlord recognised Shi Jingtang's power to name time<sup>135</sup> as well as a temporal order which was transferrable between dynasties in north China and independent from that of Liao. Therefore, just like their mutual recognition of emperorship, their respective temporal authority was acknowledged by one another and thus perceived as something divisible. This practice also took place between Liao and its vassal state of Northern Han, whose era-names – Qianyou 乾祐 and Tianhui 天會 – were recognised by Liao.<sup>136</sup>

After the conclusion of the Chanyuan Covenant in 1005, Liao and Song in their diplomatic correspondence also used their own era-names. For instance, in the oath letter sent from Song to Liao in 1005, the opening states: “On this the seventh, or *ping-hs ü* day of the first half of the twelfth, or *keng-ch'en* month of the inaugural year of the Ching-te reign period, the Emperor of the Great Sung respectfully transmits [this] oath deposition to His Majesty the Emperor of the Kitan...”<sup>137</sup> In this letter, the Song side addresses both Song and Liao monarchs as “emperor,” and employs the reign era-name of Song Zhenzong 真宗 Emperor (r. 997-1022). The letter then sent from Liao to Song followed an identical structure, and used the reign era-name of Liao's Shengzong Emperor, and again denoted the two rulers as

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<sup>134</sup> Xue, “The Liao World Order,” pp. 40-41.

<sup>135</sup> Xue, “The Liao World Order,” p. 41.

<sup>136</sup> Mori, “Sakuhōsuru kōtei to sakuhō sa reru kōtei,” p. 223.

<sup>137</sup> The translation is from Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Parity*, pp. 74-75. QDGZ, 20.213. 維景德元年，歲次甲辰，十二月庚辰朔，七日丙戌，大宋皇帝謹致誓書於契丹皇帝闕下...

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emperor: “On this twelfth, or *hsin-mou* day of the first half of the twelfth, or *keng-ch'en* month of the twenty-second, or *chia-ch'en* year of the *T'ung-ho* reign period, the Emperor of the Great Kitan respectfully transmits this [oath] deposition to His Majesty the Emperor of Great Sung:...”<sup>138</sup> Besides the aforementioned mutual acceptance of emperorship between the Liao and Song monarchs, we see that although throughout history era-names were normally indivisible designations, both Liao and Song accepted one another's imperial authority to record and to name the year rather than compel the counterpart to accept their own.<sup>139</sup>

In later diplomatic correspondence between Liao and Song, there are interesting examples which show the reign era-names of both Liao and Song juxtaposed in the same text,<sup>140</sup> in a more explicit indication of the mutual recognition of temporal authority. For instance, in 1042, a diplomatic letter sent from Liao to Song begins as follows:

On this twenty-ninth, or *gengzi* day of the first half of the eighth, or *renshen* month of the eleventh, or *renwu* year of the Chongxi reign period, the younger brother – the Emperor of Great Kitan respectfully transmits the letter to the elder brother – the Emperor of Great

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<sup>138</sup> Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Parity*, p. 76. QDGZ, 20.214. 維統和二十二年，歲次甲辰，十二月庚辰朔，十二日辛卯，大契丹皇帝謹致書於大宋皇帝闕下...

<sup>139</sup> Mori has a similar observation. See Mori Eisuke, “Kittan HokuSō kan ni okeru kōtei kan kankei no kigen to ronri ni kansuru ichi shiro” 契丹・北宋間における皇帝間関係の起源と論理に関する一試論 [On the Origins and Logics of the Relations between the Liao and Song Monarchs], *Atarashii rekishigaku no tameni* 新しい歴史学のために 286 (2015), pp. 3-20, p. 14.

<sup>140</sup> For a similar observation, see Mori, “Kittan HokuSō kan ni okeru kōtei kan kankei,” p. 14.



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Song: Your letter states that on the seventh day of the twelfth month of the inaugural year of Jingde reign period, Zhangsheng Emperor and Shaosheng Emperor had sworn that...<sup>141</sup>

Following the juxtaposition of the Liao era-name Chongxi and Song era-name Jingde in the same letter, the end of the letter again refers to the agreements concluded in 1005 as “the covenant letters of the two courts of Jingde and Tonghe (reigns) 景德、統和兩朝誓書.”<sup>142</sup> The text shows a clear Liao acceptance of both Liao and Song era-names, and by extension, the co-existence of two imperial authorities. And this juxtaposition of two era-names in the same context was not brought into question by the Song court in the responding letter. Therefore it was recognised by both Liao and Song that neither of their emperors held unlimited power beyond their state, and they were not universal monarchs but ruled two states respectively. From the cosmological perspective, the supposedly singular temporal authority was split in two.

### **The Heavenly Mandate and the Son of Heaven**

As mentioned earlier, the position of Son of Heaven and that of emperor were inventions of different historical contexts, and were imbued with different implications. The inventor of the title of emperor, Ying Zheng, seemed indifferent to the traditional title of Son of Heaven. But

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<sup>141</sup> QDGZ, 20.217. 維重熙十一年，歲次壬午，八月壬申朔，二十九日庚子，弟大契丹皇帝謹致書於兄大宋皇帝闕下：來書云，謹按景德元年十二月七日，章聖皇帝與昭聖皇帝誓曰…。

<sup>142</sup> QDGZ, 20.218.

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since the Han dynasty the emperorship and the Mandate of Heaven had normally been indivisible to one another and integral to the imperial authority, and the positions of emperor and Son of Heaven were normally equivalence for one another. However, this does not mean the two positions were always employed together. For instance, in 906, one year before the replacement of Tang by Zhu Wen, the former Tang Guiyi 歸義 military governor Zhang Chenfeng 張承奉 declared himself *baiyi tianzi* 白衣天子 (The Son of Heaven in White Attire) of the *Xihan jinshan guo* 西漢金山國 (The Golden Mountain State of Han in the West).<sup>143</sup> It appears that throughout his reign, right until its collapse in 914, Zhang never employed the title of emperor.

In an assessment of the relationship between the positions of emperor and Son of Heaven before the tenth century, we must take note of two issues. First, whether or not used together with “emperor,” the designation of Son of Heaven, and the concept of a Mandate of Heaven employed when justifying imperial rulership, were indivisible concepts exclusive to one, indicating universal and supreme authority. Second, those who were recognised to be a *true*

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<sup>143</sup> For a general history on Xi Han Jinshan guo, see for instance, Duan Ruichao 段锐超, “Dunhuang Xi Han Jinshan guo zhengquan xingzhi jiqi liguo jucuo chengbai xilun” 敦煌西汉金山国政权性质及其立国举措成败析论 [On the Nature of Dunhuang Xi Han Jinshan State and Lessons from Its Governing], *Wenzhou daxue xuebao · shehui kexue ban* 温州大学学报 · 社会科学版 25.5 (2012), pp. 24-29; Duan Ruichao 段锐超, “Dunhuang Zhangshi guiyi jun ji Xi Han Jinshan guo zhengquan yu Zhongyuan wangchao guanxi tanjiu” 敦煌张氏归义军及西汉金山国政权与中原王朝关系探究 [On Relationships of Guiyi Garrison of Dunhuang Zhang Family and Xi Han Jinshan State with Central Plain Regimes], *Shihezi daxue xuebao (Zhaxue shehui kexue ban)* 石河子大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) 26.1 (2012), pp. 106-11; Gu Jichen 顾吉辰, “Xi Han Jinshan guo xinian yaolu” 西汉金山国系年要录 [A Chronicle of the Xi Han Jinshan State], *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 (1991:3), pp. 62-71.

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emperor were always the single person perceived to possess the eligibility for the Mandate of Heaven.

However, the tenth century witnessed changes to the understanding of the Mandate of Heaven and the position of Son of Heaven, as well as their relationship to other imperial designations. One of these changes followed the same pattern as emperorship and temporal authority. The Mandate of Heaven, and thus most likely the position of Son of Heaven, was regarded as divisible among multiple imperial claimants. Another change was that between mutually recognised emperors, in some cases the two concepts remained exclusive to one ruler as before, or at least their divisibility was less explicitly demonstrated compared to other imperial designations like “emperor.” In other words, the emperorship of two imperial claimants might be mutually acknowledged, but their eligibility for the Mandate of Heaven or their position as Son of Heaven was not always mutually acknowledged explicitly. As we shall see, in some situations the possession of the Mandate of Heaven was separable from the position of emperor and other imperial designations, and a legal emperor could be someone without the Mandate of Heaven.

As mentioned above, the title of emperor might have been introduced to Liao and used by Abaoji in the early tenth century, but it is unclear about whether he held the title of Son of Heaven like his southern counterparts. Neither do we have firm evidence as to whether Deguang did declare himself Son of Heaven of Liao, although his honorific title was indeed “Son of Heaven Emperor.” Of course, it is reasonable to suggest that the early Liao emperors

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may have considered themselves Sons of Heaven following the Sinic tradition, because the position was compatible with native concepts of heaven-derived rulership, and had long been inseparable from the position of emperor which by Abaoji's reign had already been introduced into Liao. When the latter was employed by Liao rulers, the Son of Heaven was possibly also introduced to Liao.

Regardless of whether the early Liao monarchs used the position of Son of Heaven, in interactions with their southern neighbours, Liao made alterations to the Sinic concepts of Son of Heaven and the Mandate of Heaven. The first change is illustrated by the Liao-Later Jin relationship. As Standen has pointed out, in 936 Deguang had invested Shi Jingtang as Son of Heaven, a position indicating universal supremacy. But the investiture ritual in fact also formalised Shi Jingtang's identity as a subordinate of Deugang, which contradicts with the supposed incomparable superiority of the Son of Heaven.<sup>144</sup>

The second change is that heaven-derived rulership became divisible. The concept of heaven was important in justifying the Liao rulership, as shown by many Liao era-names, honorific titles and posthumous names of emperors. However, in the 936 investiture ritual of Shi Jingtang, the edict issued by Deguang plainly acknowledges that Shi Jingtang, a vassal of Deguang, had received the Mandate. As Deguang's edict informs Shi Jingtang: "the Mandate of Heaven is upon you, thus [I] appoint you [as emperor], and [you] should accede to the imperial throne."<sup>145</sup> As discussed above, it is unclear that whether the Sinic concept of

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<sup>144</sup> Standen, "What Nomads Want," pp. 144-46.

<sup>145</sup> *JWDS*, 7:75.22745.

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Mandate of Heaven had been adopted by Liao monarchs to justify their own imperial authority. But it seems clear that the Liao emperors, who regarded their own rulership as justified by divine and heavenly power, had acknowledged their counterparts and inferiors of northern China as holders of the Mandate of Heaven. Although Standen does not explicitly point out the divisibility of the heaven-derived rulership, she makes the insightful observation that while investing Shi Jingtang as the Son of Heaven, in his edict Deguang devotes several lines to a depiction of his own impressive defeat of the Later Tang forces with the assistance of deities and the stratagems of his officials, which “manifests the will of Heaven,” thus overtly “claiming the Mandate for himself.”<sup>146</sup> These actions mirror “a significant realignment of the conventional Chinese understanding of relations between neighbouring monarchs”<sup>147</sup> – that is, the divisibility of the eligibility for the Mandate of Heaven.

### **A legal emperor without the Mandate of Heaven**

Since the Han dynasty, the Sinic tradition had been that those who declared their emperorship and who were believed to be a legitimate emperor without exception claimed to have received the Mandate of Heaven. But from the tenth century onwards, this relationship between an emperor and its justifier (Mandate of Heaven) became ambiguous and underwent some changes, as reflected by extant sources. As mentioned, we may observe the first documented divisibility of emperorship in the interactions between Later Liang and Former Shu monarchs in 912. Scholars have interpreted the rhetoric between the two sides as an

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<sup>146</sup> Standen, “What Nomads Want,” p. 144.

<sup>147</sup> Standen, “What Nomads Want,” p. 144.

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expression of diplomatic parity,<sup>148</sup> but what interests this chapter is their attitudes towards the Mandate of Heaven. In 912, in a state letter sent from Zhu Wen to Wang Jian, while addressing Wang as emperor and acknowledging that he and Wang had “divided the world,”<sup>149</sup> Zhu claims that he had acquired the Mandate of Heaven without recognising the same of Wang Jian:

When [the sage lords] Tang [Yao] and Yu [Shun] abided by the manner of abdication [to the capable successors], and when Tang [of the Shang dynasty] and Wu [of the Zhou dynasty] established their imperial enterprise in accordance with the wishes of the deities and masses, there must have been holy objects manifesting their imperial enterprise.

Dynastic transitions since the ancient times, and the foreordained destinies of the rise of heroes, without doubt were in accordance with the Mandate of Heaven and the wishes of the masses...<sup>150</sup>

I still remember serving alongside [you], [the Shu] Emperor, my dearest Eighth Brother, under the former [Tang] dynasty. The [Tang] court honoured us with satrapies and titles that surpassed the bounty afforded commanders and ministers. For a long time, we kept

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<sup>148</sup> On the Liang-Shu relationship, see Wang, *The Former Shu Regime*, pp. 111-23.

<sup>149</sup> Wang, *The Former Shu Regime*, p. 115.

<sup>150</sup> Gou Yanqing 勾延慶, *Jinli qijiu zhuan* 錦里耆舊傳 [Biographies of the Shu Elite], in Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 et al. (eds.), *Wudai shishu huibian* 五代史書彙編 [Compilation of Sources of the Five Dynasties] (henceforth *JLQJZ*) (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004), 10.6.6034. 夫唐虞致治遵禪讓之明文，湯武開基允神人之至願，必有神器，是膺皇圖，況古今疊代之期，英豪興隆之數，莫不上開天命，下順人心。

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in touch by mail and established a compact as brothers, forging an incontrovertible covenant to respect the merits of one another. Yet before long communications were disrupted...<sup>151</sup>

The fortune does not favour the Virtue of Earth any more, and destiny accorded with the Element of Metal. Although my hands and feet were full of calluses and my rough and simple life was full of distress, stars and auspicious omens are upon me. Facing the public sentiment of hundreds of officials and the accumulated disasters of the Four Quarters, I thus established the capital in between He and Luo [rivers], in response to the [requirements] of Heaven and Earth.<sup>152</sup>

It is interesting to see that in the letter although Zhu Wen “expressed his modesty before his rival,”<sup>153</sup> he nevertheless notifies Wang about the transfer of Mandate of Heaven from Tang to himself. He first sets up an air of grandeur, in which Zhu expresses his thinking that dynastic change and the rise of heroes takes place in accordance with the Mandate of Heaven. Although Zhu subsequently acknowledges that Wang Jian dominates the whole world together with him as an equal, and recognises Wang as an emperor, the focus shifts immediately from this expression of equality to signs indicating that the Mandate of Heaven

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<sup>151</sup> *JLQJZ*, 10.6.6034. This part of translation is based on Wang, *The Former Shu Regime*, p. 114, with minor modification. 且念與皇帝八兄，頃在前朝，各封異姓。土茅分裂，皆超將相之尊；魚雁往來，久約弟兄之契。歡盟甚固，功業相推，俄隔絕於音塵。

<sup>152</sup> *JLQJZ*, p. 10.6.6034. 時衰土德，運應金行，雖手足胼胝，粗平多難，而星辰符瑞，謬付厥躬。當百辟之群情，極四方之積患，爰都河洛，用答乾坤。

<sup>153</sup> Wang, *The Former Shu Regime*, p. 115.

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had been given to himself, rather than Wang Jian. As he explains, the Mandate of Heaven had swapped its client, as indicated by that the Virtue of Earth, which was the representative agent of the Tang dynasty, had waned and that the Agent of Metal, chosen by Zhu as the representative agent of Liang, had risen. The letter interprets this to be due to the change to the Mandate's preference, foreseen by auspicious omens, which led to the accession of Zhu who in his own words was humble and common. Zhu further writes that the officials supported him and the miserable world needed him, and therefore he established his own imperial enterprise as a response to the will of "Heaven and Earth." So, while Zhu Wen perceived the emperorship as something legally divisible, in his view the Mandate of Heaven exclusively favoured him. This implies that only one of the emperors could be Son of Heaven. In addition, by emphasising the transfer of agent from Earth to Metal, he presents his dynasty alone as the legitimate successor to Tang, and no other.

More strikingly, although Wang Jian's response overtly expressed his equality with Zhu Wen as a coexisting emperor, Wang's letter confirms that the Liang monarch had obtained the Mandate of Heaven, without mentioning Wang's own eligibility to obtain the Mandate:

I recall in former times Emperor and I had the good fortune to serve together under the former dynasty, both privileged by imperial favour and deputed to save the court from danger. Neither of us expected the inalterable doom of the [Tang] royal house...At this time, Emperor and I presided in coterminous fashion as sovereigns over our respective domains...I received word from afar that Emperor had acceded to the throne and



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established the dynastic enterprise, in accordance with the [will of] Heaven and in compliance with [the wish of] the masses.<sup>154</sup> [Your highness] has saved the lives from the disasters, and demonstrated your kindness and prestige even to the animals. [Thus] the Imperial Essence of the Southeast [cardinal direction] gathered [in Your Highness' place], and the distinguished auspices of He (Yellow) and Luo Rivers all reached...<sup>155</sup>

In the letter, Wang employs the rhetoric which in preexisting tradition was typically employed towards a true Son of Heaven. He acknowledges that Zhu had followed the instructions of Heaven and the request of masses, having established the imperial enterprise and saved the suffering people. The Imperial Essence from the Southwest and the He Luo auspicious omens are also classical tropes employed to celebrate the reception of the Mandate of Heaven and indicate the identity of a would-be Son of Heaven. Wang Jian doubtless treated himself as a legitimate emperor with equal status to Zhu Wen, which had been recognised by Zhu. But Wang does not attempt to persuade Zhu that Wang himself held the position of Son of Heaven or received the Mandate of Heaven. Neither of them considered Son of Heaven or the Mandate of Heaven as divisible like the position of emperor.

A similar phenomenon can be found in interactions between Liao and its southern neighbours. In excavated Liao tomb inscriptions, there are examples which acknowledge the coexistence

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<sup>154</sup> *JLQJZ*, 10.6.6035-36. This part of translation is based on Wang, *The Former Shu Regime*, p. 117, with minor modification. 竊念早歲與皇帝共逢昌運，同事前朝，俱榮倚注之恩，並受安危之寄，豈期王室如毀，大事莫追.... 此際與皇帝同分茅土，共統邦家...遠聞皇帝，應天順人，開基立極。

<sup>155</sup> *JLQJZ*, 10.6.6036. 拯生靈於塗炭，示恩信於豚魚，東南之王氣咸歸，河洛之殊祥畢至。

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of other imperial claimants who were not perceived to hold the Mandate of Heaven. For example, we can observe that the relationship between the Mandate of Heaven and a recognised legitimate emperor was interpreted to be separable in a Liao tomb inscription written for Liu Jiwen 劉繼文 in 981. Liu Jiwen was a member of the Later Han royal house - a nephew of the second Northern Han emperor.<sup>156</sup> In 950, a Later Han general, Guo Wei 郭威 (r. 951-954), rebelled and established Later Zhou, becoming the new ruler of northern China. Liu Chong, a former royal member of Later Han, re-established the Han court and declared him emperor at Taiyuan. Around three months later he sought Liao patronage and received investiture as the Divine and Martial Emperor of Great Han.<sup>157</sup> The regime existed for nearly three decades, and was eventually destroyed in 979 by Northern Song.<sup>158</sup> According to the account in Liu Jiwen's tomb inscription, he escaped to Liao after the demise of Northern Han and died in Liao. In his tomb inscription, which was written from the Liao perspective, northern China regimes of Later Zhou and Northern Song are treated as illegal usurpers and false imperial claimants, just as northern China regimes usually described many of their surrounding neighbours. The text reads:

In the third year of Qianyou when the Gaozu Emperor [of Later Han] died and the young emperor acceded to the throne, the disasters came. The treacherous subordinate Guo Wei usurped the throne... The sun and moon had no light, and the heaven and earth lost their

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<sup>156</sup> "Liu Jiwen muzhi" 劉繼文墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Liu Jiwen] in *Liaodai shike wenbian*, pp. 71-78.

<sup>157</sup> "Liu Jiwen muzhi," pp. 71-72; *JWDS*, 11:136.4262-64. Standen, "The Five Dynasties," pp. 112-13.

<sup>158</sup> On the wars between Northern Han and Northern Song, see Lorge, pp. 137-40, 151-58, 181, 190-93.

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colours...[Liu Chong] wanted to capture the usurpers but had no Heavenly Mandate. In order to realise the great enterprise, he had to come to [our] Celestial Dynasty. Thus the emperor [Liu Chong] sent envoys to us to forge an alliance and was willing to enter a fictive father-son relationship...When the Zhao house [of Northern Song] invaded [Northern Han], [Northern Han] had no power or strategies [to fight against Song]...[Thus Liu Jiwen] came to [our] Superior State.<sup>159</sup>

The portrayal of the Later Zhou emperor as treacherous usurper and the Northern Song emperors simply as the house of Zhao indicate a Liao denial of the imperial claims of these two regimes. In contrast, the Later Han and Northern Han courts were accepted as legitimate holders of imperial power, as the position of emperor and the temple names ascribed to them have already indicated. However, this does not mean that the Liao acknowledgement of their imperial claim meant the acceptance of them as recipient of the Mandate of Heaven. The Liao side plainly denied the Northern Han monarchs' status as Sons of Heaven since they "had no Mandate of Heaven," while recognising them as legal emperors. On the contrary, Liao is named as the Celestial Dynasty and Superior State, from which the frustrated Northern Han emperors had sought assistance and even refuge. The contrast between Liao as a celestial state and the northern China regimes as either usurpers or emperors with no Mandate of Heaven, underscores Liao as the only holder of the Mandate of Heaven. We do not know much about how the Northern Han monarchs considered the same issue in their own

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<sup>159</sup> "Liu Jiwen muzhi," p. 72. 至乾祐三年，高祖崩逝，少帝承翰才立，禍發蕭牆。逆臣郭威，僭行篡奪.....日月無光，乾坤失色.....(崇) 直欲生擒逆黨，活捉奸訛。其奈天數未時，攻討莫下。將謀大事，須向天朝。遣使結歡，願為父子.....泊乎趙氏犯關，力乏計窮.....(劉繼文) 來歸上國。

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diplomatic documents to Liao, but clearly for the Liao side a legal emperor was not equivalent to a Son of Heaven.

It is also well-known that in the eleventh century Liao and Song had concluded diplomatic parity. However, while both sides addressed themselves and one another as emperor in their diplomatic letters and employed their respective era-names, they never explicitly employed Son of Heaven for themselves or their counterparts. Nor did they mention anything about obtaining the Mandate of Heaven in their diplomatic correspondence.<sup>160</sup> This absence of self-reference as Son of Heaven or holder of the Mandate of Heaven can of course be seen as refraining to use expressions of superiority in diplomatic occasions when aiming for diplomatic parity. But it is also possible to understand the issue from a different perspective: that both Liao and Song in fact were actually maintaining *silence* with regard to anything pertaining to one another's relationship with the Mandate of Heaven. The topic was a non-discussion zone. They never denied their counterpart's Mandate of Heaven, neither did they explicitly acknowledge it. The divisibility of Son of Heaven and Mandate of Heaven was less obvious in the eleventh century compared with that of other imperial positions. Emperorhip and era-names, which were considered divisible in Liao-Song diplomatic contact, were not closely connected with the position/concept of the Son of Heaven. They were considered separable from, rather than unquestionably intertwined with, the Son of Heaven and the Mandate of Heaven.

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<sup>160</sup> These exchanged letters are collected in *QDGZ*, 20.213-20, and *Song da zhaoling ji* 宋大詔令集 [The Imperial Edicts of Song] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 228-32.882-902.

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### **The divisibility of imperial designations in Liao: a different pattern**

As demonstrated, in the tenth century Liao and some of its southern neighbours had similar ideas regarding the shareability of many imperial designations. Two facts are important here. First, in the view of their ruling elite, not only was the position of emperor divisible among multiple claimants, but there could also be a hierarchical difference between emperors. As for some monarchs within the former Tang territories, this hierarchy was expressed through their employment of humble rhetoric such as “presenting” and “submitting” when sending letters to the Five Dynasties. As for Liao and its southern neighbours, this political hierarchy was reflected by their fictive familial or overlord-vassal relationships. For instance, in the investiture ritual of Shi Jingtang by Deguang in 936, one notable occurrence was that Deguang conferred his own hat and gown upon Jingtang before reading the investiture edict.<sup>161</sup> This simple act of conferring clothes was an indicator of their different political status, despite both of them being “emperors.” The conferral confirmed a superior-subordinate hierarchy,<sup>162</sup> demonstrating that Shi Jingtang’s authority as emperor was directly bestowed by Deguang. The conferral of clothes upon Shi Jingtang, and thus his accession to the throne dressed in the Kitan style, manifested Deguang’s status as overlord before the attendees of the ritual, and to those who would read the records of that moment. Also, over the following years, according to the *JWDS* Shi Jingtang always presented himself

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<sup>161</sup> *JWDS*, 7:75.2274.

<sup>162</sup> For the symbolic meaning of this conferral see Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, p. 155.

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as a humble subordinate of Deguang and Liao in front of Liao envoys. In their letters Shi Jingtang employed *chen* (臣 subordinate) to refer to himself until 938, when Deguang requested Shi Jingtang to use *er huangdi* (儿皇帝 Son Emperor) instead of *chen*.<sup>163</sup> These events indicate that the relationship between the two emperors was in fact unequal as a result of their difference of power.

However, although for Liao and its neighbours the understanding of imperial sovereignty expressed through Sinitic terminology had undergone changes, as we shall see, they in fact followed two different patterns. It is well known that the devaluation of imperial designations was a normal phenomenon in premodern societies. But we must pay note to the fact that this devaluation was less a result of the physical coexistence of multiple claimants to the royal position than their *mutual* recognition of one another's eligibility to hold the throne.<sup>164</sup> The latter is often overlooked by scholars, but in fact more effectively undermines the original exclusiveness and supposed supremacy of imperial designations. This mutual acknowledgment indicates a shared perception of the divisibility of the imperial sovereignty, having dismissed its incomparable superiority as previously assumed.<sup>165</sup>

As discussed, before the tenth century it was rare to see emperors based in northern and southern China recognise the imperial authority of one another. Nevertheless, preceding the Qin period and the creation of the title of emperor, the interstate order of the Warring States

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<sup>163</sup> JWDS, 11:137.4288.

<sup>164</sup> Xue, "Age of Emperors," p. 57.

<sup>165</sup> Xue, "Age of Emperors," pp. 50-59.

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era 戰國 (475 BCE – 221 BCE) featured the coexistence of mutually acknowledged “kings” (*wang*) who maintained both equal and hierarchical relationships with one another. Tao Jinsheng points out that regional rulers in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods maintained a system characterised by diplomatic parity.<sup>166</sup> What interests me is not the specifics of diplomatic etiquette, but the fact that many of the previous vassals of the Zhou dynasty came to hold kingship which was originally exclusive to the monarchs of Zhou. This change was brought about by a “peripheral” state. During the Spring and Autumn 春秋 period (770 BCE -476 BCE), a monarch of a southern China state Chu 楚 (?-223 BCE), Xiong Tong 熊通 (d. 690 BCE), was the first to declare his kingship alongside the Zhou kings. Then during the Warring States period, a system of mutually recognised kings gradually took shape, and when some kings saw the authority of a king had been diluted by the coexistence of too many claimants to the position, they employed another title – *di* (Lord 帝) to refer to each other and differentiate themselves from the kings.<sup>167</sup> This is an example

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<sup>166</sup> Tao, *Song Liao guanxi shi yanjiu*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>167</sup> Before and even after some of Warring States kings adopted *di* title, the *di* normally referred to deities or sage kings of mythical antiquity. On the evolution of royal titles before the imperial era, see for instance, Ji Jiayou 吉家友, “Xian Qin shiqi zuigao tongzhi zhe mingcheng gaibian suo xianshi de wangquan bianhua” 先秦时期最高统治者名称改变所显示的王权变化 [Changes of Monarchical Authority as Reflected by the Evolution of Royal Titles in the Pre-Qin Era], *Xinyang shifan xueyuan xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 信阳师范学院学报 (哲学社会科学版) 31.5 (2011), pp. 108-13; Lei Ge 雷戈, “Huangdi dansheng de sixiang yiyi” 皇帝诞生的思想意义 [The Ideological Implications of the Invention of “Emperor”], *Tianjin shehui kexue* 天津社会科学 (2005:5), pp. 129-34. On the original meaning of and differences between *huang*, *di*, and *huangdi*, see for instance, Wang Shunda 王顺达, *Shensheng Zhengzhi: Zhongguo chuantong zhengzhi de xingcheng* 神圣政治：中国传统政治的形成 [The Politics of Divinity and Sage – The Formation of China’s Traditional Politics] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2005), pp. 286-89; Liu Junnan 刘俊男, *Huaxia shanggu shi yanjiu* 华夏上古史研究 [Studies of History of Chinese Antiquity] (Yanji: Yanbian daxue chubanshe, 2000), pp. 26-29.

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of sharable or divisible royal designations prior to the invention of the title/position of emperor.

Figures during the tenth century might well have understood their age as another Warring States era. For instance, in 940 the Anzhou 安州 governor of Later Jin, Li Jinquan 李金全 changed his allegiance from Shi Jingtang to the Southern Tang emperor Li Bian. The *JWDS* records the military conflict between the two states, the Southern Tang soldiers being sent back after Later Jin recaptured Anzhou city, and the diplomatic letters exchanged between Shi Jingtang and Li Bian.<sup>168</sup> Li Bian considered the interstate relationship at the time to follow the “patterns of the Warring States” 戰國之規, treating the relationship between Later Jin and Southern Tang simply as one between equal “friendly neighbours” 睦鄰; and more interestingly, Shi Jingtang did not refute this and recognised Later Jin and Southern Tang as “two courts” 兩朝, implying his tacit concurrence with the relationship between the two states as following what Li Bian called patterns of the Warring States.<sup>169</sup>

However, it is worth noting that the mutual recognition of kingship between monarchs of the Warring States era seems not to have inspired emperors in later times. In other words, in the tenth century, for regimes born from the former Tang districts, mutual recognition of emperorship and related imperial designations seems to have been entirely of their invention, without reference to earlier precedents in history. The diplomatic letter sent from Later Liang emperor to the Former Shu emperor in fact mentions some historical precedents, which do not

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<sup>168</sup> *JWDS*, 7:79.2439-40, 2443-44.

<sup>169</sup> *JWDS*, 7:79.2443-44.



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aim to justify the mutual recognition of emperorship, simply being examples of the coexistence of states:

I learned that Emperor, my dearest Eighth Brother, occupied the western regions extending across the three circuits of Shu and assumed your own imperial titles as sovereign over a vast domain. I am delighted to send congratulatory emissaries, so that our two states can establish friendly relations. Considering the historical precedents of Cao [Cao] and Liu [Bei] [of the Three Kingdoms], [they] each had their own monarchs and subordinates; like for the former manner of Chu and Han, it is normal to divide the world. We do so in the spirit of purifying the world, barbarians and Chinese alike, to let masses survive...<sup>170</sup>

The allusions to the coexistence of the Three Kingdoms and that of the Chu and Han states simply demonstrates that Zhu Wen of Later Liang recognised Wang Jian of Former Shu as an equal who ruled part of the former Tang realm just as he did.<sup>171</sup> Neither of the historical cases mentioned in the letter were concerned with a mutual acknowledgement between emperors, and in fact the historical states the letter mentions were rivalries who fought over a perceived single eligibility to exert imperial authority. From these historical events Zhu Wen had indeed found precedents, but they were those which inspired him to explain the political

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<sup>170</sup> *JLQJZ*, 10.6.6034. This part of translation is based on Wang, *The Former Shu Regime*, p. 118, with minor modification. 尋聞皇帝八兄，奄有西陲，盡朝三蜀，別尊位號，復統高深，壹時皆賀於推崇，兩國願通於情好。征曹劉之往制，各有君臣；追漢楚之前蹤，常分疆宇。所冀同清夷夏，俱活生靈。

<sup>171</sup> Wang, *The Former Shu Regime*, p. 115.

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division of the post-Tang world and to justify his coexistence with Wang Jian, rather than for legitimising the mutual recognition of emperorship. In other words, it seems to me that even Zhu Wen was not aware that his recognition of another emperor was unprecedented in the imperial history. In addition, he was not aware that what he had initiated in fact resembled the divisibility of kingship in the pre-Qin/imperial era, which could be invoked to justify his contemporary political situation.

The reply from Former Shu shows similarities to Later Liang's letter, the content of which merely justifies Former Shu as an independent state, without any hint of awareness of their unprecedented mutual recognition of imperial designations. As the letter reads:

The histories are replete with arguments pertaining to accommodating changes. The three Kingdoms arose after the Eastern Han fell into turmoil; the Six Hegemons came into contention as the Western Zhou declined. In both cases, the new rulers did not force former monarchs to abdicate. They merely delivered the age from turmoil, consistent with the Way, bowing complacently before the throne and assessing men of valour with due care. Our western Shu was carved out of mountains and exploited geographic conditions to secure its interests. It may be remote in location, but it has sheltered two Tang emperors in the past and will retain its strategic and even cosmic significance in a divided world. Thereafter, the Shu and Liang should keep friendly relations in the manner of fraternal states.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *JLQJZ*, 10.6.6036. This part of translation is based on Wang, *The Former Shu Regime*, p. 117, with

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Again, the examples employed by Wang Jian aim to prove that regimes established in the Shu region and the region itself had advantages in terms of maintaining autonomy from the central authority, which justified his own presence as an independent imperial ruler.<sup>173</sup> Nothing is relevant to the divisibility of imperial designations and imperial sovereignty. Therefore, it appears that although in the Warring States era there were mutually recognised kings, this history did not provide direct historical resources for the divisibility of emperorship of the tenth century. The coexisting Later Liang and Former Shu did employ historical events to justify the post-Tang political landscape, but these precedents were in fact irrelevant to what they had initiated, which was unprecedented.

Relationships between Liao and its neighbours were more complicated. The Liao acceptance of more than one emperor in its form bears similarities with earlier steppe tradition which accommodated multiple “legal” qaghans.<sup>174</sup> The political structure of the so-called First and Second Turkic Empires (552-654; 682-745) accommodated both “supreme” and “subordinate” qaghans.<sup>175</sup> As Drompp has pointed out, a subordinate qaghan was “a male member of the

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minor modifications. 爰徵史冊之文，亦有變通之說。且東漢亂離之後，三國齊興；西周微弱之時，六雄競起。俱非恃強逼禪，皆以行道濟時，雍容於揖讓之前，輕重於英雄之內。況西蜀開山立國，燒棧為謀，稱雄雖處於壹隅，避亂曾安於二帝。鼎峙之規模尚在，山呼之氣象猶存。永言梁蜀之歡，合認弟兄之國。

<sup>173</sup> Wang, *The Former Shu Regime*, p. 118.

<sup>174</sup> Xue, “The Liao World Order,” pp. 44-48.

<sup>175</sup> Michael R. Drompp, “Supernumerary Sovereigns: Superfluity and Mutability in the Elite Power Structure of the Early Tūrks (Tu-jue),” in Gary Seaman and Daniel Marks (eds.), *Rulers from the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery* (Los Angeles: Ethnographics Press, 1991), pp. 92-115, p. 93.

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ruling Türk A-shi-na clan who, while not the supreme qaghan of the Türk Empire, held the title of qaghan nonetheless.”<sup>176</sup> However, the title was not equivalent to the heir apparent who was intended to succeed the throne, and there could be multiple subordinate qaghans.<sup>177</sup> This political structure, which consisted of multiple mutually recognised qaghans both supreme and subordinate, mirrors the characteristics of steppe politics: “the general instability of nomadic confederation” and “the existence of too many claimants to the throne.”<sup>178</sup> The designation of qaghan was clearly not confined to the Turkic A-shi-na clan, and rulers of other peoples or regimes, such as those of Sinic states and Tibet were called qaghans as well.<sup>179</sup> In addition, as mentioned above, the Sui and Tang emperors had borne the title of qaghan, and the early seventh-century warlords Liu Wuzhou and Liang Shidu were vassal qaghans invested by the Turkic Shibi Qaghan.<sup>180</sup> As discussed in the previous section, the title of “qaghan” had long co-existed within that of “emperor” in the Liao society. Similar to the above mentioned Turkic tradition, within the Liao Empire there were multiple qaghans and the title of qaghan could also designate foreign rulers (such as the emperors of Song). However, it is not clear to what extent the Liao elites of the early tenth century were aware that this divisibility of qaghanship was the legacy of Turkic predecessors.

As discussed, compared with the title of “qaghan,” “emperor” was used in different and stricter ways, but its usage nevertheless still shows some similarities to that of qaghan,

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<sup>176</sup> Drompp, “Supernumerary Sovereigns,” p. 93.

<sup>177</sup> Drompp, “Supernumerary Sovereigns,” p. 95.

<sup>178</sup> Drompp, “Supernumerary Sovereigns,” pp. 95, 107.

<sup>179</sup> “Supernumerary Sovereigns,” p. 92.

<sup>180</sup> Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, pp. 118-19.

especially in the context of diplomacy. Mori suggests that Abaoji and Later Tang monarchs might have referred to one another as “emperor.” As he points out, in the *JWDS* a Later Tang envoy uses *tianhuang wang* 天皇王 (literally Heavenly Sovereign King) to refer to Abaoji.<sup>181</sup> I will draw attention to another piece of information in the *JWDS*, in which the “Kitan natives” (*guoren* 國人) addressed Abaoji as *tianhuang wang* following the declaration of emperorship.<sup>182</sup> Since *tianhuang wang* as in the *JWDS* is clearly a Sinitic expression, I am of the view that this message has implies that *tianhuang wang* is a translation of Abaoji’s title in the Kitan language. This is why the text specifies that it was used by the “Kitan natives.” Mori has the similar idea that *tianhuang wang* might be a translation of a Kitan term, based on a piece of information in the *JWDS* which mentions that the Later Tang emperor Mingzong had spoken in the “frontier language” (*bianyu* 邊語) to Kitan soldiers, informing them he wanted to do battle with *tianhuang* 天皇 (Heavenly Sovereign, Abaoji).<sup>183</sup> Mori suggests that the Sinitic terms *tianhuang* and *tianhuang wang* as recorded by the *JWDS*, and *tian huangdi* 天皇帝 (Heavenly Emperor) by the *LS*, were very possibly synonymous when expressed in the Kitan language.<sup>184</sup>

The *JWDS* records that in a conversation with a Later Tang envoy, Abaoji referred to Later Tang emperors as Sons of Heaven (*tianzi*),<sup>185</sup> a term normally inseparable from, and within the political hierarchy equivalent and alternative to, emperor. As Mori points out, relations

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<sup>181</sup> Mori, “Kittan HokuSō kan ni okeru kōtei kan kankei,” p. 6.

<sup>182</sup> *JWDS*, 11:137.4279.

<sup>183</sup> Mori, “Kittan HokuSō kan ni okeru kōtei kan kankei,” p. 7.

<sup>184</sup> Mori, “Kittan HokuSō kan ni okeru kōtei kan kankei,” p. 7.

<sup>185</sup> *JWDS*, 11:137.4281.

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between Kitan and Later Tang monarchs can be traced back to an alliance in 905 between Abaoji and Li Keyong, the father of the Later Tang founding emperor.<sup>186</sup> Since the Li family was of Shatuo Turkic origin and some of the members seem to have borne the title of qaghan, Mori suggests that relations between rulers of Kitan and northern China regimes during the 920s and 930s may have been built on those between nomadic Kitan and Shatuo Turkic qaghans, which were expressed in Sinitic materials through Sinitic terminology, as between a *tianhuang wang* and a *tianzi*, and possibly also between two *huangdi*.<sup>187</sup> Therefore, the mutual recognition of emperorship between Liao and its southern neighbours may thus have happened much earlier than the aforementioned incident concerning Deguang and Shi Jingtang in 936.

Another interesting hypothesis by Mori is that the eldest son of Abaoji may have also enacted as an emperor.<sup>188</sup> According to the *JWDS*, while Abaoji held the title of *tianhuang wang*, his oldest son, Bei 倍 (899-937), held the titles of *ren haungwang* 人皇王 (Mortal Sovereign King) and *Dongdan wang* 東丹王 (King of Dongdan).<sup>189</sup> According to the *QDGZ*, after the conquest of the Bohai regime and the appointment of Bei as the king of the Dongdan Kingdom which was based in what had been Bohai, Abaoji permitted Bei to hold designations that in Sinic traditions were exclusive to emperor. For instance, Bei had his own

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<sup>186</sup> Mori Eisuke, “Sen’en no mei no rekishiteki haikai: Unchū no kaimei kara Sen’en no mei e” 澶淵の盟の歴史的背景: 雲中の会盟から澶淵の盟へ [The Historical Background of the Chanyuan Treaty: From Yunzhong Alliance to the Chanyuan Treaty], *Shirin* 史林 89.3 (2006), pp. 99-102.

<sup>187</sup> Mori, “Kittan HokuSō kan ni okeru kōtei kan kankei,” p. 7.

<sup>188</sup> Mori, “Kittan HokuSō kan ni okeru kōtei kan kankei,” p. 7.

<sup>189</sup> *JWDS*, 11:137.4285. Also see *QDGZ*, 14.171.

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imperial palace (*gongdian* 宮殿), and wore the *mian* regal headgear with twelve strings of jade (*shier liumian* 十二旒冕), and his attire was patterned with dragons.<sup>190</sup> Bei also used an independent era-name of Ganlu 甘露,<sup>191</sup> and his edicts were called *zhi* 制.<sup>192</sup> In pre-Liao history, all of these had been preserved for the only true emperor/Son of Heaven.<sup>193</sup>

Since the Liao monarchs had borne the title of qaghan alongside their title of emperor, I propose that if Bei had also assumed the title of or enacted as emperor, then both Abaoji and Bei may have held the title of qaghan. Indeed, *tian huangwang* and *renhuang wang* are quite similar to a superior qaghan and a subordinate qaghan in the Turkic political hierarchy.

Although during Abaoji's reign there was only one subordinate who might have concurrently held both titles of qaghan and emperor, at the time he was clearly Abaoji's appointed heir.

There is a further difference between the usages of qaghan and emperor (*huangdi*) within Liao discourse. While the position/title of qaghan was applicable to monarchs of other regimes as well as those belonging to the Liao domestic tribal organisation which was reminiscent of the Turkic precedents centuries ago, that of emperor was not applicable at home but divisible and shareable only in the *interstate* context, amongst monarchs of different states. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Later Jin, Northern Han, and Northern

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<sup>190</sup> *QDGZ*, 14.171. The *LS* calls these specific costumes the “costumes of the Son of Heaven,” and records that they were granted by Abaoji. *LS*, 3:72.1210.

<sup>191</sup> *LS*, 3:72.1210.

<sup>192</sup> *QDGZ*, 14.171; *LS*, 3:72.1210.

<sup>193</sup> Mori has also mentioned some of these elements in his article “Kittan HokuSō kan ni okeru kōtei kan kankei,” p. 8.

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Song monarchs had been vassal emperors of or emperors equal to the Liao rulers. But they themselves were the only emperors of their own states. Bei was Abaoji's son and was thus from the imperial Yelü lineage, but his domination of Dongdan was not entirely a Liao domestic affair. If Bei enacted as an emperor, it was because he was the emperor of Dongdan but not of Liao. According to our sources, the Dongdan Kingdom had independent administrative and political institutions which were staffed with officials many of whom had been appointed independently by Bei himself,<sup>194</sup> and Dongdan was also subject to annual tributes to the "Kitan state,"<sup>195</sup> acting as an independent vassal of Liao. Early Liao politics was thus somewhat special. Only in Abaoji's reign do we find that there might have been two coexisting and mutually recognised emperors, both of whom of the same imperial lineage (father and son). But they were still monarchs of different states. After Abaoji's reign, there was no more conferrals of the title of *renhuang wang*, and the title of emperor could not concurrently be held by a member from the imperial lineage, and there were no more legally recognised dependent states ruled by a Liao imperial member who bore the title of emperor.

It seems that there is a correlation between Liao recognition of other emperors and Liao neighbours' Tang style institutions. All the emperors (whether subordinate or equal to Liao) who were acknowledged by the Liao court had something in common: their major institutional and political structures were modeled on Tang, rather than being justified by nomadic tribal organisations. This leads to the observation that, throughout the above discussion, there were two types of relationships that characterised the interactions between

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<sup>194</sup> QDGZ, 14.171; LS, 3:72.1210.

<sup>195</sup> QDGZ, 14.171; LS, 3:72.1210.



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Liao and the emperors recognised by Liao – the familial relationship; and the interstate relationship, participants in which were defined by Tang institutional culture. In the tenth century, the subordinate and superior emperors together formed a sort of kinship, whether actual (Abaoji of Liao and Bei of Dongdan) or fictive (Liao-Later Jin/Northern Han). However, they also shaped an interstate order consisting of senior Liao emperors and the junior/subordinate emperors of dependent states. In the eleventh century, the relationship between the Liao and Song monarchs was one between two equal emperors, but also between “family” members.

### **3. Conclusion**

The discussions in this chapter have underscored that the multifaceted rulership of Liao monarchs was in fact not an ethnic issue. The two titles and thus identities – qaghan and emperor (*huangdi*) – in terms of their origins and their functions were indeed different, but the Liao rulers’ image and identity as either qaghans or emperors were not justified according to presumed ethnic differences of their targeted audiences. The Liao monarchs predominantly appear as emperors in Sinitic sources, but in Kitan materials and for those with an understanding of the Kitan language, they could appear as either emperors or qaghans, or both, depending on the context. In the tribal political structure and for nomads under Liao authority, the Liao qaghans were emperors as well. Furthermore, there was no ethnic division of the readership of these materials – many Kitan elites could understand Sinitic, and a number of high-ranking Han officials understood Kitan, not to mention those trained in the

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two languages for professional purposes such as interpreters. There was thus actually no such binary of qaghan, non-Chinese identity, and Kitan materials/discourse on the one hand; and emperor, Han/Chinese, and Sinitic language materials/discourse on the other.

But we can also see that, although the Liao elite did indeed borrow many cultural elements with Sinic origins, the Liao perception of emperorship followed a different pattern to that of their southern neighbours. The divisibility of emperorship was in fact an innovation by those regimes within the former Tang districts, which followed no preexisting tradition of dividing the royal title/position, despite the existence of such precedents. The Liao understanding of the divisibility of emperorship, on the contrary, was very possibly derived from that of qaghanship rooted in steppe and Turkic traditions. These features of the Liao imperial sovereignty – the massive borrowings from Sinic traditions and the divisibility of emperorship derived from the divisible qaghanship, were primarily a result of the great social and political changes in Eastern Eurasia beginning in the mid-ninth century which were outlined in the Introduction. Neither the sinicisation theories nor the ideas shaped around “conquest dynasties” are able to provide satisfactory explanations.

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## Chapter III Descendants of Sages: Genealogical Constructions of the Liao Imperial and Consort Clans

### 1. The problems of a common ancestry in defining ethnic identity

A common origin, real or constructed, has been noted to play an important role in shaping one's ethnic or national identity.<sup>1</sup> In the field of Liao studies, scholars have usually focused on what they believe to be the “factual” origins of the Kitan and have long debated issues such as from which earlier nomadic groups the Kitan originated, in which geographical area the Kitan began to take shape, and what possible migratory routes in Northeast Asia they travelled.<sup>2</sup> Efforts have been directed at investigating the historical “facts” which led to the formation of the Kitan, and less attention has been paid to the constructed aspects of their origin.

However, in Sinophone academia a few scholars have begun to question the limits of such approaches. The most influential works on ethnic identity and common ancestry are those of

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Geertz, “The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States,” in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Free Press, 1973), pp. 255-310, pp. 261-62; Charles F Keyes, “The Dialectics of Ethnic Change,” in Charles F. Keyes (ed.), *Ethnic Change*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), pp. 8, 210.

<sup>2</sup> Relevant discussion is abundant. For an overview of the field, see for instance, Ren Aijun 任爱君, “Guanyu Qidan zuyuan zhushuo xinxi” 关于契丹族源诸说新析 [New Reflections on the Various Discussions of the Origins of the Kitan], *Menggu shi yanjiu* 蒙古史研究 7 (2003), pp. 31-46; Guo Xiaodong 郭晓东, “Ershi shiji yilai Qidan zuyuan yanjiu shuping” 20 世纪以来契丹族源研究述评 [Review of the Studies of the Origins of the Kitan since the 20<sup>th</sup> Century], *Liaoning gongcheng jishu daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 辽宁工程技术大学学报 (社会科学版) 19.2 (2017), pp. 113-20.

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Wang Ming-ke. Inspired by theories from Western academia such as “ethnic boundaries,” “collective memory,” and “structural amnesia”<sup>3</sup>, Wang maintains that ethnic groups are not those with shared “objective” physical appearances or cultural traits, but rather those sustained by ethnic boundaries which are shaped by “the sense of otherness” and competition over natural resources.<sup>4</sup> The nature of ethnic groups is in Wang’s view defined by constructed memories of a common ancestry.<sup>5</sup> One may change his or her ethnic identification by means of altering/undergoing alterations in memories of their common origin.<sup>6</sup> For Wang, being “Chinese” is not destined, and the identification with “Chinese” will change under certain conditions.<sup>7</sup> Through two related processes – the acquiring of new constructed memories of a “Chinese” origin/ancestry, and the “forgetting” of a native/original past by both themselves and their “Chinese” counterparts, the perceived China’s historical ethnic minorities, or “peripheral groups” as termed by Wang, shaped their ethnic identification towards “Chinese” and completed the process of “sinicisation.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On this concept, see P. H. Gulliver, *The Family Herds: A Study of Two Pastoral Tribes in East Africa, the Jie and Turkana* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, 1955), pp. 108-17.

<sup>4</sup> Wang, *Huaxia bianyuan*, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Wang, *Huaxia bianyuan*, p. 12; Wang Ming-ke 王明珂, “Lun panfu: Jindai Yan Huang zisun guozu goujian de gudai jichu” 論攀附：近代炎黃子孫國族建構的古代基礎 [The Ancient Foundations of Modern Nation-Building in China: The Case of the Offspring of Yan and Yellow Emperors], *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊, 73.3 (2002), pp. 583-624, p. 603.

<sup>6</sup> Wang, *Huaxia bianyuan*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Wang, *Huaxia bianyuan*, p. 14. In his works Wang constantly employs an ambiguous concept of *Huaxia* and provides no clear explanation, but in his writings the term has been normally used interchangeably with Han/Chinese without carefully distinguishing their differences in historical and present contexts.

<sup>8</sup> Wang, *Huaxia bianyuan*, p. 283.

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Wang's works are influential within Sinophone academia and have inspired many responses. Beyond the simple discussion of "factual origins" of a given ethnic group, his works draw upon a rich selection of theoretical resources from Western academia and have inspired new ways to re-examine ancestry and identity issues in East Asian context. Influential as they are, Wang's discussions encounter the same problems as other scholarship. As will be discussed, this is because this body of scholarship is built upon the assumption that constructed memories of common ancestries/origins of those such categories are constructed for, for instance Han/Chinese or Kitan, are always ethnic issues.

This assumption is problematic in several ways. First, Wang defines ethnic groups by looking for memories of a common origin, but just like language, religion, or physical appearance, no single aspect can define an ethnic group.<sup>9</sup> For example, as will be discussed, the two ruling clans of Liao who are labelled by historians as Kitan had constructed themselves as descendants of Huangdi. At the same time, the two labels of the Kitan and Han and the perceived cultural and political distinctions between the two were maintained throughout the Liao period, and would even penetrate into much later times. In Wang's works, Huangdi is always a Han/Chinese (or *Huaxia*, in some of his writings) figure and the Liao ruling clans' adoption of such a figure as their forebear, in Wang's view, indicated an ethnic change. Therefore, if we examine ethnic identity by Wang's definition, we find a clear paradox: the perceived origins of the Liao ruling clans had been constructed as cognate with Han/Chinese,

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<sup>9</sup> Wang has pointed out that any single element, such as language, cannot justify ethnic identities, but he controversially treats the constructed memories of a common origin as such a defining factor, which is also problematic. Wang, *Huaxia bianyuan*, pp. 27-32.

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while the ethnic categories of Kitan and Han and ethnic boundaries between them remained.<sup>10</sup>

And when one defines ethnic identities from a broader sense as most anthropologists and historians do, it is apparent that the boundaries are even clearer, despite their shared constructed common origin: the Liao elite retained and continued to practice many of their native elements in aspects of language, religion, dress and eating habits, marriage style and law enforcement, as Wittfogel and Feng outline in their book.<sup>11</sup> The Liao elite did not wholly commit themselves to what we call “Chinese” cultures, even if many elements were borrowed. In other words, changes in common origin did not automatically lead to changes in ethnic boundaries or identity. A shared ancestry, no matter by definition as the only or one of the markers of ethnic identity, is not equivalent to a shared membership of one ethnic group.

Another issue Wang neglects to examine is that whether an “origin” or “ancestry” had always

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<sup>10</sup> This paradox is partly created by the terminology used by Wang – he does not define what is *Huaxia* or what is Han. He sometimes uses the term *Huaxia* interchangeably with Han/Chinese. In other cases he employs the term to describe what he perceives as both a historical common community – which includes Han and what he calls “peripheral groups” – and a modern constructed community equivalent to Chinese/China (*Zhonghua minzu/Zhongguo ren* – Han and other ethnic minorities). In present-day China, the term of *Huaxia* may make sense in some cases. For instance, some of the officially recognised ethnic minorities, such as Wang’s major subject of study – Qiang – treat themselves as cognate with the Han majority while do not label themselves as “Han.” In today’s political context of China, this shared origin is normally interpreted by official discourse as Qiang’s identification with China (in its broader sense as a bigger community) whose core is perceived to have been defined by Han. But the problem is that we cannot assume that the historical regimes and elites must have conceived of a similar ethnic common community.

<sup>11</sup> Wittfogel and Feng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*.

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been ascribed with an ethnic identity in historical times. To put it in another way using the Liao example, we need to ask if the Huangdi origin was understood by the Liao ruling clans as exclusively the ancestry of, or belonging to, a concrete ethnic other (Han)? Or was the ancestry treated by them merely as a common legacy of antiquity that others, including the Han, also desired to, had, and could lay claim to? This is an important distinction, because the former is ethnicity-oriented and assumes that the Liao ruling groups were taking a consciously “ethnic” view: deliberately seeking to adopt a new ethnic identity through appropriating an ancestry (or other elements) that was already claimed by another group. It means one group was attracted by an ethnic other because of its cultural, military, or whatever advantage, and also by the possibility of becoming part of that other ethnic group over their own. Alternatively, were the Liao elites more concerned with history and with prestige, leading their actions to have less to do with ethnic considerations? In this view, adopting a Huangdi origin was unrelated to the centripetal power or irresistible lure of Han civilisation, and rather derived from the particular political context of the eighth- to ninth-century Eastern Eurasian continent outlined in the Introduction. It was simply a sharing of common legacies that were available to everybody, and in this case the mythical figure Huangdi just happened to have a Sinic origin.

But as already mentioned, in Wang’s writings, his object of study – the historical/mythical figures such as Huangdi taken as ancestors by “peripheral” ethnic groups – are treated by him as *ethnically* “Han” or “Chinese.” In his view, for these peripheral ethnic groups, Han/Chinese ancestors and origins are always presented to be a *target* of acceptance or

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resistance, with the goal of either claiming ties with “the Han/Chinese” or independence from “the Han/Chinese.” In Wang’s studies, Liao is one of many such cases of consciously ethnic choices.<sup>12</sup> As he argues, claiming descent from Huangdi was a “standard narrative” used by certain Liao elites who had entered China to explain the ethnic origins of Liao, a regime on the political-geographical peripheries of China.<sup>13</sup> Scholars from mainland China have engaged with similar issues. They tend to see the construction of Huangdi as the Kitan forebear as a marker of the sinicisation of the Kitan people, which is an indication of the superiority of Han culture. In this view, this borrowing of a new ancestry signalled the identification with Han identity, and more broadly, with “China” or Chinese nationality.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For these cases, see Wang, “Lun panfu,” pp. 595-602; Wang Ming-ke 王明珂, *Yingxiong zuxian yu dixiong minzu: Genji lishi de wenben yu qingjing* 英雄祖先与弟兄民族：根基历史的文本与情境 [Heroic Ancestors and Brotherly Nations: Texts and Contexts of the Primordial History] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), pp. 59-178.

<sup>13</sup> Wang, “Lun panfu,” pp. 601-2; Wang, *Yingxiong zuxian yu dixiong minzu*, p. 158.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance, Zhao Yongchun 赵永春, “Shilun Liaoren de Zhongguo guan” 试论辽人的中国观 [On the Concept of China in Liao], *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 (2010:3), pp. 78-90; Zhao Yongchun, “Qidan zicheng ‘Yan Huang zisun’ kaolun” 契丹自称“炎黄子孙”考论 [On the Kitan Self-identification as Scions of Yan and Huang] *Xi’nan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 西南大学学报 (社会科学版) 38.6 (2012), pp. 137-142; Zhao Yongchun, “Guanyu Zhongguo gudai Hua Yi guanxi yanbian guilü de lixing sikao: Hua Yi guanxi de lishi dingwei, yanbian gui ji yu wenhua xuanze” 关于中国古代华夷关系演变规律的理性思考——华夷关系的历史定位、演变轨迹与文化选择 [On the Relationship between Hua and Yi in Ancient China: The Historical Positioning, Path of Evolution, and Cultural Choices], *Xuexi yu tansuo* 学习与探索 (2012:1), pp. 148-56; Song Dejin 宋德金, “Liaochao zhengtong guannian de xingcheng yu fazhan” 辽朝正统观念的形成与发展 [The Formation and Development of the Liao Concept of Legitimacy], *Chuantong wenhua yu xiandaihua* 传统文化与现代化 (1996:1), pp. 41-45; Guo Kangsong 郭康松, “Liaochao Yi Xia guan de yanbian” 辽朝夷夏观的演变 [The Changing Concepts of Hua and Yi in Liao], *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中国史研究 (2001:02), pp. 89-95; Wu Yuhuan 武玉环, “Lun Qidan minzu Hua Yi tongfeng de shehui guan” 论契丹民族华夷同风的社会观 [On the Concept of “Sharing Common Cultures and Costumes by Hua and Yi” of the Kitan], *Shixue jikan* 史学集刊 (1998:1), pp. 11-16.



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But assuming Huangdi lineage as something which is exclusive to the Han/Chinese ethnic identity also presents a paradox. The Liao elites were the conquerors of a large population usually identified as Han/Chinese, and – as all conquerors do – considered themselves superior to their subjects. It is thus difficult to imagine that the Liao ruling clans would borrow and identify themselves with an ancestral figure bearing the identity of the conquered subject. The Yelü and Xiao were at the top of the social and political hierarchy, staffing “most of the political and military key positions and owned most of the empire’s wealth.”<sup>15</sup> The boundaries between the two ruling families and Han were consciously maintained. For instance, members of the two ruling families intermarried with one another, with those of Han category only occasionally being accepted.<sup>16</sup> Han elites might be delegated key functions and could play an important role in the central government’s policies and civil affairs. Some of them might even acquire higher status and privileges than Kitan colleagues. But in general elites from the Han group and their power were “restrained by the overlordship of an alien group of conquerors” and kept from certain “essentials of political and military power.”<sup>17</sup> If it is the case that Huangdi “belonged” to the Han/Chinese ethnic group, then we cannot explain why the Liao imperial and consort clans, as the ruling stratum, would be willing to take historical figures of their subjects (the ruled Han) as their ancestors and identify themselves with the ruled. Or in short, simply treating Huangdi as exclusively as Han ancestor posits difficulties in explaining why the conquerors should identify themselves with

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<sup>15</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*, p. 191.

<sup>16</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*, pp. 191, 195.

<sup>17</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*, p. 195.

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the conquered in terms of origin.

It should be noted that Wang has clarified that his definition for an ethnic group in the pre-modern context primarily pertains to ruling clans and aristocratic families rather than the wider masses, and it was only the former who claimed to share noble origins traceable to Huangdi. Therefore, in fact Wang does not automatically identify the followers and subjects of the non-Han/Chinese elite as Xianbei, Kitan or Jurchen, instead focusing on the elite strata. As Wang has pointed out, throughout history with regard to the issue of a common ancestry there was a different trend at play – the privilege of claiming origin from Huangdi gradually extended from the upper class to commoners.<sup>18</sup> But Wang’s discussion of this social aspect of a common origin is confined to different social strata within what in his view was the “Chinese realm” or “Chinese regimes” such as Tang and Song. In his study, the class differentiation was applied only to the “Chinese” rather than “non-Chinese” groups (e.g. only Song emperors, ministers and commoners). Wang does not differentiate enough between non-Han/Chinese elite (e.g. the Kitan aristocrats) and non-Han/Chinese commoners. Whenever changes related to constructed ancestry are observed in groups from non-Han/Chinese categories, they are always treated by Wang as an ethnic rather than a social/political issue.

In this chapter, I argue that ancestral figures such as Huangdi have always been problematically ethnicised in modern historiography, or more specifically, “sinified” as

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<sup>18</sup> Wang, *Yingxiong zuxian yu dixiong minzu*, pp. 179-88; Wang, “Lun panfu,” pp. 21-22.

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ancestors *of* the Han and seen as owned by this particular ethnic group exclusively. We must carefully examine whether such figures always bore such ethnic implications in the eyes of those who treated them as ancestors. It is not an issue of whether the Kitan had been sinified, which has been debated between scholars from various perspectives. This has implications for the very feasibility of the application of this ethnic discourse in the study of the Liao. To be clear, this is not about whether a “Chinese ancestry” is indispensable to the “Chinese ethnic identity,” but rather if we should call this ancestry “Chinese” in the first place.

Of course, in retrospect the adoption of Huangdi origin by the Liao elite appears to indicate a hegemonic discourse of, as scholars may term, “Chinese” culture. But it only seems “hegemonic” from our present-day perspective. For the Liao elite in the tenth and eleventh century, as will be discussed, Huangdi was venerated and favoured primarily because of his “universal” image as a prestigious ruler rather than his “Chinese” identity. As we shall see in a later section, I contend that for groups/families of the non-Han category shown in our primary and secondary sources, changes in common ancestry indeed indicate changes in identity. But I mean something different by “identity.” The identity of a common origin in this context was one of multiplicity, and as such it was also contextual. There were various aspects to this identity, including those ethnic, political, cultural, elite, prestigious, or ancient. Whether these “non-Han” families were conquest/ruling elites, whether they were under the direct rule of empires labelled as “Han/Chinese,” whether they consciously perceived and accepted the Han as a hegemonic power in culture and politics, whether they had long merged with those labelled/categorised as Han, or a combination of any of the above; all of

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these circumstances would have an impact on the ways in which they understood the identity of an ancestral figure. In this chapter, I would contend that the two Liao ruling clans' adoption of a Huangdi origin was not a sign of becoming ethnically "Chinese," but primarily one marking their identity as part of the universal elite stratum across Eastern Eurasian regimes. Although the Liao elite shared a common forebear with their Sinic neighbours, they exploited this shared prestigious ancestry for its function to qualify them as equal to, that is as eminent as, others in terms of origin and bloodline, the ultimate aim of which being to justify the existence of a distinct Liao identity among multiple neighbours in their contemporary multi-state world.

## **2. The Yelü clan and the lineage of Huangdi**

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, faced with challenges from the West, scholars of China have constructed Huangdi as a common ancestor for all Chinese people, attempting to show the equivalence between the "yellow" and "white" races in aspects such as historical depth and intelligence.<sup>19</sup> From that period on, "the Descendants of Huangdi" has frequently appeared in China's scholarship and popular media to promote a sense of shared

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Dikötter, *Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1992), pp. 71, 116-19. In the late Qing period the "royalists" and "constitutionalists" held opposite views on if the "descendants of Huangdi" should include non-Chinese groups such as Manchu and Mongolians. But after the establishment of the Republic of China, in general Huangdi has been seen as the common ancestor of all ethnic groups living within the territory of the country. See Wang Xurui 王旭瑞, "Lishi weizhi jiyi – Huangdi jisi de liubian" 历史之为记忆—黄帝祭祀的流变 [Memorialised by History – The Veneration of Huangdi and Its Evolution], *Shehui kexue pinglun* 社会科学评论 (2007:2), pp. 21-30, pp. 25-30.

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identity.<sup>20</sup> Later on, since the 1970s, Chinese scholarship has also constructed Yandi 炎帝 (the Fire Emperor), normally presented in mythical and historical narratives as the brother of Huangdi, as another common ancestor of the Chinese people.<sup>21</sup>

Having been framed within nationalist discourse, the above concepts of “Descendants of Huangdi” or “Descendants of Yan[di] and Huang[di]” are in fact quite “modern” inventions. However, a sense of shared identity bound through a common ancestry traceable to Huangdi or other related ancient sage kings has deep roots in premodern times, and is not simply a “modern” construction.<sup>22</sup> As Charles Le Blanc has shown, in the pre-imperial era Huangdi appeared in Sinitic historical records with multi-faceted images, including those indicating genealogical ancestry, paradigmatic emperorship and divinity.<sup>23</sup> During the course of the Warring States period to the Han dynasty, in historical sources Huangdi gradually acquired a supreme status, becoming the most honoured and memorialised figure among multiple sage kings of antiquity.<sup>24</sup> Starting from *Shiji* 史記 (Historical Records), the first Sinitic Standard History, by synthesising different characteristics demonstrated in pre-imperial era materials its author Sima Qian 司馬遷 presented a collective and new image for Huangdi – the great

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<sup>20</sup> Huo Yanyun 霍彦云, “‘Yan Huang zisun’ chengwei de lishi yanbian jiqi yiyi” “炎黄子孙” 称谓的历史演变及其意义 [The Historical Development and Connotation of the Term “the Descendants of Yan and Huang”], *Xieshang luntan* 协商论坛 (2008:4), pp. 21-24, pp. 21-23.

<sup>21</sup> Huo, “‘Yan Huang zisun’ chengwei de lishi yanbian jiqi yiyi,” pp. 23-24.

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Ebrey, “Surnames and Han Chinese Identity,” in Melissa J. Brown (ed.), *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), pp. 11-36, pp. 26-30; Wang, “Lun panfu,” pp. 584-87.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Le Blanc, “A Re-Examination of the Myth of Huang-ti,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 13.1 (1985), pp. 45-63.

<sup>24</sup> Wang, *Yingxiong zuxian yu dixiong minzu*, pp. 587-91.

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conqueror, the inventor, and the figure who created a new era of civilisation and begat descendants spreading all over the known world.<sup>25</sup>

Prior to the Liao dynasty, it was already common practice for ruling families categorised by historians as non-Han to claim descent from sages or eminent rulers of antiquity.<sup>26</sup> The Liao imperial and consort clans showed a similar interest in these mythical and ancient figures. The major sources for studying the Liao ruling clans' claims come from the shortened version of genealogies in tomb inscriptions, records from scholars of contemporary Northern Song who were involved in intensive diplomatic contact with Liao, and those sporadically recorded in the *LS*.

It is worth noting that direct references to Huangdi as the forebear of the Yelü clan are primarily recorded in materials from the late Liao period. For instance, although the compilers of the *LS* considered the Liao imperial clan's descent to be from Yandi, they acknowledge that a Liao official history, which underwent compilation from 1103, showed a different opinion: "From consulting the *Shu* [written] for the Yuwen Zhou [regime], the Liao are descended from Yandi. But Yelü Yan professed Liao descent to be from Xuanyuan (Huangdi)."<sup>27</sup> In this passage, Yuwen refers to the surname of the royal clan of the Northern Zhou regime with nomadic origins known as Xianbei (Sārbī), and the *Shu* means the official

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<sup>25</sup> Wang, "Lun panfu," pp. 591-95.

<sup>26</sup> Relevant scholarship is abundant. See for instance, Wang, "Lun Panfu," pp. 596-602; Wang, *Yingxiong zuxian yu dixiong minzu*, pp. 59-172.

<sup>27</sup> Xuanyuan was the surname of Huangdi. *LS*, 3:63.949. 考之宇文周之《書》，遼本炎帝之後，而耶律儼稱遼爲軒轅後。

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history produced for Northern Zhou – the *Zhou shu* 周書 (Book of Zhou) compiled during the early Tang period. According to *Zhou shu* account, members of Yuwen clan were scions of Yandi.<sup>28</sup> The compilers of *LS* assumed that Liao (or the Yelü clan) was cognate with Yuwen, but they also reveal that Yelü Yan, a late Liao period historian, held a different view. The historical project supervised by Yelü Yan was *Huangchao shilu* 皇朝實錄 (Veritable Records of the Imperial Dynasty), compiled under the order of the Tianzuo 天祚 Emperor (r. 1101-1125) and in which Yelü Yan considered Liao originated from Huangdi. Though Yelü Yan's work is not extant, it was still accessible when the *LS* was compiled and was one of its most important references.<sup>29</sup> Since Yelü Yan compiled the work under the order of the last Liao emperor as an official history,<sup>30</sup> his view that the Yelü clan were descendants of Huangdi was much more than a mere personal idea and must have been a well acknowledged claim by the Liao court and the imperial clan.

Similar claims can be found in a tomb inscription written for the Liao Yongqing princess.<sup>31</sup> Her inscription claims that “[The princess] was ...the grand-niece of Shengzong Xiaoxuan

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<sup>28</sup> Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 et al., *Zhou shu* 周書 [Book of Zhou] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1971, reprinted 1974), 1:1.1.

<sup>29</sup> Feng, *Liao shi yuanliu kao yu Liao shi chujiao*. For a recent article on *Huangchao shilu*'s relationship with *LS*, see Yang Jun 杨军, “Yelü Yan *Huangchao shilu* yu *Liao shi*” 耶律俨《皇朝实录》与《辽史》[Yelü Yan's *Huangchao shilu* and *Liao shi*], *Shixue shi yanjiu* 史学史研究 (2000:3), pp. 78-82.

<sup>30</sup> For the biography of Yelü Yan, see *LS*, 3:98.1415-16.

<sup>31</sup> On Yongqing Princess, see Yuan Haibo 袁海波 and Li Yufeng 李宇峰, “Liaodai Hanwen “Yongqing gongzhu muzhi” kaoshi” 辽代汉文《永清公主墓志》考释 [On the Sinitic “Tomb Inscription for Yongqing Princess”], *Zhongguo lishi wenwu* 中国历史文物, (2004:5), pp. 71-76.

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Emperor. [Our] state was descended from Xuanyuan Huangdi.”<sup>32</sup> “Shengzong” and “Xiaoxuan” are the temple name and the posthumous name of the sixth Liao emperor, Yelü Longxu, and the Yongqing princess was a grandchild of a younger brother of the emperor.<sup>33</sup> In the passage, the lineage of Yelü is denoted by “the state,” and this is clearly interpreted to be the offspring of Huangdi (Xuanyuan was the given name of Huangdi). Given the royal identity of Yongqing princess, this kind of view must have been one acknowledged and accepted by the Liao imperial house, and known to Liao court officials including the writer of this inscription.

At present we have no earlier direct reference from the Liao period to Huangdi as the forebear of the Liao imperial clan, but textual records and archaeological evidence show that in the tenth century the Yelü clan had already claimed their origins from the royal house of the Han dynasty. This constructed ancestry from the Han dynasty imperial lineage indicates that the Huangdi origin may have already been adopted by the Yelü clan by that time or slightly later, because it is well-known from Sinitic historiography that the Han royal house also claimed descent from Huangdi.

Although our tenth-century sources, especially tomb inscriptions, do not explicitly record the Huangdi origin of the Yelü clan, this absence may be due to writing conventions for tomb inscriptions in premodern times. Notably, narratives of one’s ancestry in tomb inscriptions did

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<sup>32</sup> See “Yongqing gongzhu muzhi” 永清公主墓志 [The Tomb Inscription for Yongqing Princess] in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 226-28, p. 226. 蓋國家系軒轅黃帝之後。

<sup>33</sup> “Yongqing gongzhu muzhi,” p. 226.



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not always begin with the most distant ancestors (e.g. Huangdi) from remote mythical antiquity. In many cases, narratives of genealogies begin with the Zhou period when clans first took on surnames,<sup>34</sup> or sometimes with the Han dynasty when the “first ancestor” of a clan emerged, who “was probably the earliest ancestor to appear in the comprehensive genealogical tables preserved by individual families.”<sup>35</sup> This absence of records with regard to the ages prior to Zhou or Han did not mean one’s ancestry was considered untraceable to earlier periods, but rather that writers of genealogies would assume their audience’s knowledge of these presented figures’ more remote ancestry back to sages in antiquity.<sup>36</sup>

Besides, the purpose of the genre of tomb inscription was not to provide a full genealogical list. As Tao Yukun points out for Liao tomb inscriptions, their primary sources were normally family genealogies, sometimes complemented by other sources such as officially compiled Liao State Histories (*guoshi* 國史).<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, no Liao genealogies are extant. Family genealogies and tomb inscriptions served different purposes. While the former usually recorded a detailed genealogical tree for a family, the latter, with a focus on the individual life story of the deceased, normally recorded genealogies in a laconic way, or sometimes lack any genealogy at all.<sup>38</sup> In some cases, inscriptions will indicate based upon which sources – family genealogies, State Histories, or both – genealogical narratives in inscriptions were

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<sup>34</sup> Ebrey, “Surnames and Han Chinese Identity,” p. 27; Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*, p. 63, note 86.

<sup>35</sup> Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*, p. 63.

<sup>36</sup> Ebrey, “Surnames and Han Chinese Identity,” p. 27-28.

<sup>37</sup> Tao Yukun 陶玉坤, “Liaochao jiazhi shi yanjiu” 辽朝家族史研究 [A Study of the Family History of the Liao Dynasty], *Shixue shi yanjiu* 史学史研究 (2007:4), pp. 78-84, pp. 81-82.

<sup>38</sup> Tao, “Liaochao jiazhi shi yanjiu,” pp. 79-80, 83-84.

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written.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, we find that in some Liao tomb inscriptions references are not made directly to Huangdi but to the royal house of the Han dynasty whose origin was traceable to Huangdi. For instance, in recent decades, discoveries of new tomb inscriptions from the Liao period have provided us with more and much earlier evidence concerning the Liao imperial claim to the lineage of Huangdi. In 2015, archaeologists had undertaken an excavation at a Liao tomb site in Duolun 多倫 (Dolonnur) County in Inner Mongolia after a tomb robbery.<sup>40</sup> An epitaph was discovered and its owner was a concubine of Yel ü Longxu, the sixth emperor of the Liao dynasty. The epitaph was buried with the concubine in 993, and it contains the earliest extant archaeological record about Yel ü's ancestry back to the Han dynasty. The beginning of the inscription reads that:

Our state and family got the fortune for lasting thousands of years, and the two surnames [Yel ü and Xiao] illustrate the nobility of the [imperial and consort] clans. The Yel ü [clan] was Liu, descended from the Han house. For generations they married to [members of] Lanling, just like the kings of Zhou valued the Jiang clan.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Tao, "Liaochao jiazhi shi yanjiu," p. 81.

<sup>40</sup> Neimenggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 內蒙古文物考古研究所, Xilin guole wenwu baohu guanlizhan 錫林郭勒盟文物保護管理站, Duolun xian wenwuju 多倫縣文物局, "Neimenggu Duolun xian Xiaowangligou Liaodai muzang" 內蒙古多倫縣小王力溝遼代墓葬 [The Liao Tomb at Xiaowangligou, Duolun County, Inner Mongolia], *Kaogu* 考古(2016:10), pp. 55-80.

<sup>41</sup> "Neimenggu Duolun xian Xiaowangligou Liaodai muzang," p. 78. 惟國家千齡啟運，二姓辨族系尊。耶律，漢室之宗，劉氏也。世娶蘭陵，周王之重姜姓也。

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As the tomb inscription shows, Yel ü of the imperial clan was also referred to by the surname Liu, descended from the imperial lineage of the Han dynasty. Lanling, as will be discussed, was the perceived place of origin of the Liao consort clan members, and in the passage is used to denote the Xiao clan. In Liao tomb inscriptions written in Sinitic, the emphasis on having a surname was a common practice for imperial and consort clans. From what historians normally call the “Kitan” group, the Yel ü and Xiao were intermarried clans and the only ones with surnames, which was thus symbolic of their ruling status in Liao.<sup>42</sup> But for them, the surnames were more than a simple indicator of their ruling status, and also acting as a symbol of their noble origins traceable to centuries beforehand.<sup>43</sup> It was these distant and prestigious origins which not only gave them surnames but also conformed to their contemporary eminent ruling status.

There are other similar examples. For instance, a tomb inscription buried in 1072 written for a previous South Prime Minister – Yel ü Zongfu 耶律宗福 – contains praise of the surname’s origin from the royal house of the Han dynasty: “[The surname of Yel ü] during Han times was the surname of the state...in the Tang dynasty it was noble in hierarchy.”<sup>44</sup> It is worth noting that Zongfu was in origin not of the imperial lineage and the Yel ü surname was one granted by the emperor to his clan. Zongfu was from the Han 韓 family, one of the most

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<sup>42</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*, p. 206.

<sup>43</sup> Ebrey, “Surnames and Han Chinese Identity,” p. 21.

<sup>44</sup> “Yelü Zongfu muzhi” 耶律宗福墓志 [The Tomb Inscription for Yel ü Zongfu], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 141-45, p. 142.

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eminent families of the Liao Empire, many members of which held key positions in the Liao court.<sup>45</sup> Zongfu's great grandfather Han Zhigu 韓知古 had served Liao since Abaoji's time, and the entire Han clan had been granted the Yel ü surname from Zongfu's grandfather Han Derang 韓德讓 onwards.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Zongfu's clan identified themselves with another lineage traceable back to Huangdi through Shuyu 叔虞, an uncle of King Wu of the Zhou dynasty 周武王 (d. ca. 1043).<sup>47</sup> However, the passage cited above is not about Zongfu's original surname but the imperially granted one. The "state surname" of the Han dynasty indicates the imperial surname Liu of the Han dynasty, demonstrating the noble origins of the Yel ü clan. The interpretation concerning the Tang period denotes the continuing high level of prestige and eminent status in the Tang dynasty of the Liu lineage descent from the Han imperial house, which was officially classified by the Tang government as one of the "eminent families."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> On Liao eminent families, see Wang Shanjun 王善军, *Shijia dazu yu Liaodai shehui* 世家大族与辽代社会 [Eminent Families and Liao Society] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> On the Han family, see Du Xingzhi 都兴智 and Zhao Hao 赵浩, "Guanyu Liaodai Yutian Hanshi jiazhu Qidanhua de jige wenti" 关于辽代玉田韩氏家族契丹化的几个问题 [On the Kitanisation of the Yutian Han Family of Liao], *Liaoning shifan daxue xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 辽宁师范大学学报 (社会科学版) 34.3 (2011), pp. 116-19; Shi Fengchun 史凤春, "Han Zhigu jiazhu de hunyin yu zhengzhi" 韩知古家族的婚姻与政治 [Marriage and Politics of the Han Family], *Heilongjiang minzu congkan (shuangyue kan)* 黑龙江民族丛刊 (双月刊) (2009:6), pp. 101-3; Wang Yuting 王玉亭, "Cong Liaodai Han Zhigu jiazhu muzhi kan Hanshi jiazhu Qidanhua wenti" 从辽代韩知古家族墓志看韩氏家族契丹化的问题 [On the Kitanisation of the Han Family: Based on Liao Tomb Inscriptions of Han Zhigu's Clan], *Beifang wenwu* 北方文物 (2008:1), pp. 59-64.

<sup>47</sup> See for instance, the genealogy recorded in the tomb inscription for Zongfu's ancestor Han Kuangsi's 韓匡嗣, "Han Kuangsi muzhi" 韓匡嗣墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Han Kuangsi], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 23-27, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> On the eminent families in the medieval period of China, see David G. Johnson, *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1977).

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Still, there is no direct evidence about when the Yel ü clan members began to claim Han dynastic descent. According to the Northern Song source *Wenchang zalu* 文昌雜錄 by Pang Yuanying 龐元英, which was possibly completed during the early second half of the eleventh century, it was the founding emperor of Liao – Abaoji – who first adopted the imperial surname of the Han dynasty. In his work, the author records a piece of information he had heard from another Song official Zhang Chengyi 張誠一:

I once met the Military Commissioner Zhang Chengyi. He said [to me]: “In the year I served as an envoy to the northern caitiff (i.e. Liao), I asked [someone] about the origins of Yel ü and Xiao surnames. The people there said: ‘in the past, the Heavenly Sovereign King [Abaoji] asked his officials: Since the ancient times, who has been the [most] wise and valiant emperor? His officials replied: No one is comparable to the Gaozu Emperor of the Han [dynasty]. [Abaoji] then further asked: Who was the best among his officials? The officials responded with Xiao He. The Heavenly Sovereign King therefore gave himself a surname Yel ü, a [Kitan] translation of Liu. His empress was granted the surname of Xiao.’”<sup>49</sup>

This is the earliest textual record which speaks of the origin of the Liao imperial surname. We

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<sup>49</sup> Pang Yuanying 龐元英, *Wenchang zalu* 文昌雜錄 [Various Information Heard from the Department of State Affairs] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), 5.55. 余嘗見樞密都承旨張誠一，說：“昔年使北遼，因問耶律蕭姓所起。彼人云：‘昔天皇王問大臣云：自古帝王英武為誰邪？其大臣對曰：莫如漢高祖。又問：將相勳臣孰為優？對以蕭何。天皇王遂姓耶律氏，譯云劉也。其後亦錫姓蕭氏。’”

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have no information about the date Pang Yuanying completed this work, nor do we have his birth or death dates. But his writings state that he was employed as an official late in the reign of Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1067-1085) and early in the reign of Zhezong 哲宗 (r. 1085-1100) of Northern Song. As Pang Yuanying records, the information concerning Abaoji's surname came from Zhang Chengyi. We have little information about Zhang, but in 1075 under Song orders he went to Hedong to negotiate a territorial dispute between Song and Liao.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the conversation must have taken place after Zhang had returned. According to what Zhang had heard from the Liao side, the two surnames of the Liao imperial and consort clans were taken on by the first Liao emperor in admiration of the Han founding emperor and his eminent Prime Minister Xiao He.

Although this information is recorded in a Northern Song source, it seems safe to infer that by around the middle of the eleventh century, the construction that the Liao imperial surname was connected to the Liu of the Han dynasty was widespread within the Liao Empire. This is firstly because the Song writers acknowledge that they had drawn their information from the Liao side as opposed to inventing the Liao genealogies themselves. Second, there was no reason for these Song officials to give what they perceived as “barbarian” neighbours a prestigious past if the Liao ruling clans did not present one for themselves. Therefore, although from this record it is unclear whether it was truly Abaoji who first adopted the surname for the imperial clan, we know that at least already before the mid-eleventh century the Liao side believed it to have been taken by the first emperor for his clan, and this was

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<sup>50</sup> Li Tao 李燾, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 [Extended Continuation to the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governing] (1183; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 11:261.6359.

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then also circulated to Song envoys and officials. As Patricia Ebrey has pointed out, a surname has the function of indicating a common ancestor.<sup>51</sup> Liu, adopted by the Yel ü clan, might well set the ground for exploring the surname's genealogical value for expanding the historical depth and enhancing the prestige of the Yel ü clan. If it was Abaoji who first introduced the surname of Liu, it implies that it was possibly also him and his officials who began to genealogically connect the Yel ü clan to the Han royal family and thereby to more distant ancestors (Huangdi).

Similar information is recorded in the section of *Biographies of Empresses and Concubines* 后妃傳 in the *LS*: “Taizu Emperor admired Gaozu Emperor of the Han dynasty, therefore the Yel ü was also called Liu. [Abaoji] saw Yishi and Bali (clans who gave consorts to the Yel ü) as comparable to [the clan of] Prime Minister Xiao [He], so granted them the surname of Xiao. Records in the *Liao History* • *Biographies of Empresses and Consorts* by Yel ü Yan and in that [history with the same name] by Chen Daren 陳大任 are similar [to one another].”<sup>52</sup> As we can see, *LS*'s content was drawn from the histories written by the late Liao historian Yel ü Yan and the Jin historian Chen Daren. As mentioned above, Yel ü Yan was the supervisor of the official project *Veritable Records of the Imperial Dynasty* in the late Liao period, and the *Liao History* mentioned by the *LS* must have been the same work. From this record in the *LS*, we know that the official history in the late Liao period also held the idea that the Liu surname was adopted by the Yel ü clan from the reign of the first emperor.

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<sup>51</sup> Ebrey, “Surnames and Han Chinese Identity,” p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> *LS*, 3:71.1198. 太祖慕漢高皇帝，故耶律兼稱劉氏；以乙室、拔里比蕭相國，遂為蕭氏。耶律儼、陳大任《遼史·后妃傳》，大同小異，酌取其當著于篇。

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However, although there is no direct archaeological evidence from Abaoji's reign on his adoption of the royal surname of Han, I suspect the aforementioned textual records have their grounds. First, a prestigious origin is normally an important aspect of constructing imperial legitimacy. Given that during Abaoji's reign he and the Liao court had already introduced many imperial cultural elements with Sinic origins into Liao, it is reasonable to suggest that to build up an eminent past for the Liao imperial clan following preexisting Sinic traditions may have also been an integral part of the Liao legitimation at the time. What Abaoji needed was perhaps not simply an imperial throne and imperial designations characterised by borrowed Sinitic terminology, but a deeply rooted "history" and a distant noble ancestry for the Liao imperial house, which grounded their "destined" acquirement of the Mandate.

In addition, a constructed noble origin traced to ancient sages was a feature of many regimes and their ruling families prior to and contemporary with Liao, and many Liao subjects who had a Han background also had constructed origins from sages such as Huangdi. That means, the Liao state was born and had long existed in a social and cultural context in which to seek a sagely past rooted in mythical antiquity or royal ancestries from eminent empires was a kind of "social norm." For instance, the Later Liang emperors who succeeded Tang in northern China claimed descent from Yao (a descendant of Huangdi). Their competitor, rulers of the Jin Princedom, who had Turkic origin from Central Asia and would go on to conquer Later Liang and establish Later Tang, declared continuing loyalty to the Tang house after it was replaced by Later Liang. For the Later Tang ruling clan, who originally bore the surname



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Zhuye, their granted imperial Li surname was one of their political resources. The Tang royal identity in the late ninth century, was awarded due to their military achievements in pacifying a large rebellion against the Tang government. Other regional rulers, such as Yang Xingmi 楊行密 (r. 902-905) of the Wu state, claimed descent from the Hongnong 弘農 Yang clan, one of the great families of Tang. The royal lineage of Liu of the Han dynasty was popular not just in Liao, but also attracted other admirers, such as the imperial clan of Southern Han 南漢 (917-971), and another Liu clan of Turkic origin whose members established Later Han and Northern Han in 947 and 951 respectively. These are merely a handful of examples from the tenth century which were integral to the wider social and cultural context in which Liao was born. The many similar cases prior to the tenth century would also have provided the Liao rulers with precedents, and may have inspired them to seek a distant past comparable to their neighbouring ruling families.

In fact, the Liao ruling families in Abaoji's time might have already been familiar with and attracted to stories framed around royal figures of the Han dynasty and perhaps treated them as having sacred and religious powers. For instance, in 1993, archaeologists excavated two robbed tombs in the Baoshan 寶山 area. The two sites are dated to 923, the second year of Tianzan of Abaoji's reign. The owner of one tomb was a Kitan nobleman, whose precise identity is unconfirmed but should have been either a son of the youngest brother of Abaoji or a descendant of the Kitan qaghan who had reigned prior to Abaoji. One of his tomb murals is inscribed with "*Jiangzhen tu*" 降真圖 (Painting of the Descending Master). It depicts the seventh emperor of Han - Liu Che's 劉徹 (r. 141-87 BCE) audience with a mythical figure

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Xi Wangmu 西王母 (Queen Mother of the West), who is accompanied by three fairies.<sup>53</sup>

The prototype of the story depicted in the mural can be dated back centuries prior. It first appears in a book – *Han Wudi neizhuan* 漢武帝內傳 (An Anecdotal Biography of the Wu Emperor of the Han Dynasty) – produced around the transitional period from the Wei 魏 (220-266) to Jin 晉 (265-420) dynasties, framed in Daoist discourse. In Sinitic writings, Liu Che is known for his addiction to a quest for immortality. The story recorded in *Han Wudi neizhuan* is framed around the narrative that Xi Wangmu, a figure whose stories are first mentioned in pre-imperial era and in later interpretations becomes a divine being in Daoist belief, descends to the mortal world and gives direction to Liu Che about how to become immortal.<sup>54</sup> The theme of the Liao mural, which is based on the *Han Wudi neizhuan*, depicts

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<sup>53</sup> On the tombs and their murals, see Neimenggu wenhua kaogu yanjiusuo 內蒙古文物考古研究所 and Alu Keerqin Qi wenwu guanlisuo 阿鲁科尔沁旗文物管理所, “Neimenggu Chifeng Baoshan Liao bihua mu fajue jianbao” 內蒙古赤峰宝山辽壁画墓发掘简报 [Archaeological Reports on the Liao Mural-tombs at Baoshan, Chifeng of Inner Mongolia], *Wenwu* 文物 (198:1), pp. 73-95. Wu Hong 巫鸿 and Li Qingquan 李清泉, *Baoshan Liaomu: Cailiao yu shidu* 宝山辽墓: 材料与释读 [Liao Tombs at Baoshan: Materials and Interpretations] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2013); Wei Zheng 韦正, “Baoshan yihao Liaodai bihua zaiyi” 宝山 1 号辽代壁画墓再议 [Reexamining the No. 1 Liao Mural-tomb at Baoshan], *Wenwu* 文物 (2013:11), pp. 51-60; Zhang Qian 张倩, “Zaoqi Liaodai Qidan guizu mushi bihua de tezheng: yi Baoshan M1 M2 mu mushi bihua weili” 早期辽代契丹贵族墓室壁画的特征——以宝山 M1、M2 墓室壁画为例 [Features of Early Liao Elite Tomb Murals: With a Focus on the Murals of M1 and M2 Tombs at Baoshan], *Rongbaozhai* 荣宝斋 (2013:4), pp. 40-55.

<sup>54</sup> Wang Qing 王青, “*Han Wudi neizhuan* yanjiu” 《汉武帝内传》研究 [Studies of the *Han Wudi neizhuan*], *Wenxian* 文献 (1998:1), pp. 3-28; Liu Jie 刘杰, “Han Wudi gushi jiqi wenhua chanshi” 汉武帝故事及其文化阐释 [Stories of the Han Wu Emperor and Their Cultural Interpretations] (Nankai University Ph.D diss., 2010); Du Wenping 杜文平, “Xi Wangmu gushi de wenben yanbian ji wenhua neihan” 西王母故事的文本演变及文化内涵 [Textual Transmissions of the Stories of the Queen Mother of the West and Their Cultural Interpretations] (Nankai University Ph.D diss., 2014).

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the moment when Xi Wangmu and her fellows appear in front of Liu Che. As scholars have pointed out, the scene fits the funerary context well, and mirrors the spiritual world of the Kitan in the ways in which they perceived the afterlife.<sup>55</sup>

While scholars tend to interpret the theme of the mural simply as showing the influence of “Chinese” culture or Daoist ideology on the Kitan,<sup>56</sup> I would suggest we need to pay more attention to the aspect of how the Liao court perceived the history of the Han dynasty itself. Those who assigned this scene for a funeral occasion must have had a good understanding of Sinitic historiography and religious tradition. But the application of a Han dynasty theme is not just an issue of the mural designers’ skill to employ historical and religious stories for funeral purposes, but also of the familiarity with and acceptance of such stories by the Kitan elite in the very early stages of their imperial era. Given the context of the tomb owner being a high status Kitan nobleman and that the burial site was a “private” and sacred space for the deceased, it is difficult to argue that the topic of Liu Che was merely a random choice. Especially considering that many Sinitic materials were abounded with stories about seeking immortality, the particular choice of an emperor of the Han dynasty seems to be selective. In other word, traditions of the Han imperial house seem to have meant something special to the Liao imperial clan, and Han-dynasty precedents were taken by Liao rulers as important means to express their own cultural and religious beliefs, as the mural shows.

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<sup>55</sup> Wei, “Baoshan yihao Liaodai bihua zaiyi,” p. 59.

<sup>56</sup> Zhang, “Zaoqi Liaodai Qidan guizu mushi bihua de tezheng,” pp. 51-52; Wei, “Baoshan yihao Liaodai bihua zaiyi,” p. 59.

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Of course, Liu Che's image is far from singular and he was famous for more than his search for immortality within Daoist discourse. Although criticised by many later historians because of his enthusiasm for military and territorial expansion, in Sinitic historiography he was widely memorialised and celebrated for precisely that. Under his reign, the Han Empire made a conquest of, or expanded to, the nomadic Xiongnu centred in Mongolia to the north, Hainan island, the kingdoms of Yelang (based in present-day Yunnan province) and Nanyue (based in Guangdong, Guangxi Provinces and northern Vietnam) to the south, the northern part of Korean peninsula to the east, and polities in Central Asia to the west who in time became the protectorate states of the Han Empire.

It might well be the religious and heroic/noble images of Liu Che – a mighty imperial ruler who greatly expanded an empire and pursued immortality with zeal, rather than his “Chinese” ethnic/cultural identity, that attracted both the designers of the mural and the Liao elites. Liu Che's presence in the tomb mural might be an embodiment of a previously established connection between the Han and Liao history. In addition, the deceased was buried two years before the end of Abaoji's nearly two decades' reign. It is thus also reasonable to suggest that by this time, Han dynasty precedents already held importance for the understanding of the Kitan past and their spiritual world. In this context, it is not implausible that in earlier times Abaoji had introduced Liu as an alternative surname, which was likely either the result of an increasing prestige of Han dynasty history among Kitan ruling members, or an added weight to the importance of the Han dynasty in the Liao imperial tradition. Of course, all these hypotheses require further evidence. But regardless of the precise timing that the two

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surnames and the lineages of Liu and Xiao were introduced into Liao, it is clear that they were believed in Liao to have originated from Abaoji's reign. The aforementioned textual sources from Song and by Yelü Yan are good evidence for the diffusion of such information to foreign areas and their acceptance by Liao domestic elites.

The constructed external origin of the Liao imperial clan is also demonstrated by their invented home of origin – Qishui 漆水, which connected them to the lineage of Huangdi. Qishui refers to a river in present-day southern Shannxi 陕西 Province, and which is recorded in the *Shiji* and its later pre-Liao commentaries.<sup>57</sup> As Du Xingzhi has pointed out, according to these pre-Liao records the Qishui area was the place where the ancestors of the Zhou and Han dynasties originated, who were descendants of Huangdi.<sup>58</sup> Du believes the phenomenon that many members of Yelü clan appear in tomb inscriptions and histories as originating from Qishui and bore the titles such as the Prince of Qishui Prefecture to be indicators that the Yelü elite considered themselves as belonging to the same ancestral lineage as kings of the Zhou and Han – that of Huangdi.<sup>59</sup> According to Du's study, according to the extant evidence, the first Prince of Qishui Prefecture title was given to imperial members no later than 949, which he believes shows that in the early Liao period the Yelü clan already

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<sup>57</sup> Du Xingzhi 都兴智, "Liaodai Qidanren xingshi jiqi xiangguan wenti kaotan" 辽代契丹人姓氏及其相关问题考探 [On the Family Names of the Liao Kitan and Other Related Issues], *Shehui kexue jikan* 社会科学辑刊, (2000:5), pp. 101-5, p. 103. Also see Du Xingzhi, "Qidanzu yu Huangdi" 契丹族与皇帝 [The Kitan and Huangdi] in Han Shiming 韩世明 (ed.), *Liao Jin shi lunji di shi ji* 辽金史论集第 10 辑 [Studies on the Liao and Jin History, Vol. 10] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007), pp. 1-5, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Du, "Liaodai Qidanren xingshi," p. 103; Du, "Qidanzu yu Huangdi," p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Du, "Liaodai Qidanren xingshi," p. 103; Du, "Qidanzu yu Huangdi," p. 3.

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considered themselves to be descended from Huangdi.<sup>60</sup>

Liu Pujiang disagrees with Du and considers Qishui as either the river or the Yel ü place of origin to be located within the Liao dominion, though he admits that this argument requires further evidence.<sup>61</sup> However, Liu also acknowledges that in the Kitan language Qishui was a loanword from Sinitic.<sup>62</sup> This fact works against Liu's own view, showing that Qishui was not of Liao/Kitan native origin but of Sinic/Sinitic origin. If Qishui were located somewhere within the areas traditional and central to the Kitan tribes, it would be difficult to believe there was no corresponding Kitan vocabulary and only a Sinitic term for such an important place taken to be the home of the Yel ü clan. In short, it seems that Qishui, both the name and the place it denotes, was of Sinic origin outside the Liao realm.

Pierre Marsone, following Du, considers Qishui to be a place within present-day Shannxi Province where ancestors of the Zhou house had lived, a place by which the Yel ü clan could

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<sup>60</sup> Du, "Qidanzu yu Huangdi," p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Liu Pujiang 刘浦江, "Qidanzu de lishi jiyi – yi 'qingniu baima' shuo wei zhongxin" 契丹族的历史记忆——以“青牛白马”说为中心 [The Historical Memory of the Kitan: A Focus on the Tale of the “Black Ox and White Horse”] in Liu Pujiang 刘浦江, *Songmu zhijian – Liao Jin Qidan Nizhen shi yanjiu* 松漠之间——辽金契丹女真史研究 [Between the Song and Mo: Studies on the History of Liao, Jin, the Kitan and the Jurchen] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), pp. 99-122, pp. 121-22. Pierre Marsone also points out that the scholarship which links Qishui with the rivers within the Liao has no reasonable ground. See Pierre Marsone, *La Steppe et l'Empire: La formation de la dynastie Khitan (Liao)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2011), p. 36.

<sup>62</sup> Liu, "Qidanzu de lishi jiyi," p. 122. On the term Qishui in the Kitan small script, see Chinggeltei et al., *Qidan xiaozi yanjiu*, p. 73; in the large script, see Liu, *Qidan wenzi yanjiu leibian*, p. 358. The written forms of Qishui in Sinitic, Kitan large script, and small script are: 漆水, 犀水, 𐰇𐰏𐰤.

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establish their connection to Huangdi.<sup>63</sup> As Marsone further points out, Qishui is normally cited by the *Shiji* together with another river within Shannxi – Jushui 沮水, which was another place the ancestors of the Zhou house had once dwelled. Within the district to which Jushui belonged was a mountain called Qiaoshan 橋山, which was normally considered to be the burial place of Huangdi.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, considering the connection between Qishui and dynasties of Zhou and Han, the nearby Jushui and the burial place of Huangdi, the view that Qishui represented a relationship between the Liao imperial clan and Huangdi, argued for by scholars like Du and Marsone is more convincing. The story about Qishui was possibly introduced from the southern neighbours of Liao, or the Kitan with an education in Sinitic, and became the source for coining a time-honoured place of origin for the Liao Yel ü clan.

### **3. The Liao consort clan and the Lanling Xiao lineage**

In a similar way to the imperial clan who adopted a foreign origin for themselves, the consort clan of the Liao dynasty chose a foreign ancestry from the historical Xiao lineage, which originated in a place called Lanling. “Xiao” as a surname was traced to Song Zhizi 宋支子 (also known as Daxin 大心), who was a Western Zhou noble. The king of the Zhou dynasty enfeoffed him an area named Xiao (in today’s Anhui 安徽 Province) due to his pacification of a rebellion in around 682 BCE, and because of this enfeoffment his descendants changed their surname to Xiao. After 597 BCE when another vassal state, Chu, destroyed the Xiao state, Song Zhizi’s descendants dispersed, with one of the branches residing in the Feng 豐

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<sup>63</sup> Marsone, *La Steppe et l’Empire*, p. 36.

<sup>64</sup> Marsone, *La Steppe et l’Empire*, p. 36.

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and Pei 沛 area (in present-day Xuzhou 徐州, Jiangsu 江蘇 Province). This was the native place of the renowned Prime Minister of the Han dynasty, Xiao He (257-193 BCE).<sup>65</sup> The first Han emperor, Liu Bang, invested Xiao He as *Zanhou* 鄴侯 (Marquis of Zan, in present-day Hubei 湖北 Province).

From Xiao He's grandson Xiao Biao onwards, some of the Xiao family began to reside at Lanling (located in present-day Shandong 山東 Province), and this branch at Lanling flourished, producing numerous renowned figures, by virtue of which Lanling became the *junwang* 郡望 (home of origin) of those with Xiao as their surname. During the fifth to sixth centuries, the royal houses of two successive southern dynasties, Qi 齊 (479-502) and Liang 梁 (502-557), were of consanguinity (at least according to the available sources) and had a same Xiao surname. The royal members located their *junwang* at Lanling,<sup>66</sup> and in terms of lineage they traced their history back to Xiao He, or to the beginning of the Xiao family in the

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<sup>65</sup> On the history of Xiao, see Tan Jie 谭洁, "Lanling Xiaoshi shixi jiqi nanqian guli kaobian" 兰陵萧氏世系及其南迁故里考辨 [The Lineage of Lanling Xiao Family and an Investigation of Its Residence in the South], *Qilu wenhua yanjiu* 齐鲁文化研究 11 (2011), pp. 72-77, pp. 72-73.

<sup>66</sup> From the third to the sixth centuries, after the once unified empire Western Jin 西晋 (265-316) fell, multiple non-Han groups entered north China plain. Many families including the royal family of Western Jin, who then established Eastern Jin 東晋 (317-420), immigrated to south China due to wars and chaos in the north. Also among the immigrants were members of the Xiao family, who called their new southern dwelling place "Southern Lanling." After the Eastern Jin period, four successive dynasties established themselves in south China – Song 宋 (420-479), Qi 齊 (479-502), Liang 梁 (502-557), and Chen 陳 (557-589). In Sinitic historiography the rulers of Qi and Liang appear as from the same lineage and had the Xiao surname, and they traced their early history to Xiao He. But as historians have shown this should have been a construction by the royal families of Qi and Liang. See Tan, "Lanling Xiaoshi shixi jiqi nanqian guli kaobian," pp. 72-77.



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Western Zhou period initiated by Song Zhizi.<sup>67</sup> The descendants of this lineage from the Qi and Liang dynasties continued to be eminent and influential in the subsequent Sui and Tang dynasties in many fields such as in literature, politics and the military.<sup>68</sup>

During the Liao period, in Sinitic materials the consort clan members also presented themselves as members from the same Xiao lineage with Lanling as their home of origin. But there are discrepancies about when the consort clan adopted the Xiao surname. In the *Biography of the Empress and Consort Clan* of the *LS*, prior to Abaoji's reign members from the future consort clan had already been recorded with the surname Xiao.<sup>69</sup> However, the aforementioned story which recorded Abaoji's admiration of Han Gaozu and Xiao He suggests that Xiao was adopted for the consort members during the reign of Abaoji. The eleventh-century sources such as the *Xin Wudaishi*, however, ascribe the adoption of the surname to a submitted official of Later Jin, who in 947 suggested the uncle of the reigning Liao emperor take Xiao as his surname, which was then used by other consort members.<sup>70</sup>

As Du Xingzhi points out in one of his articles, an extant Liao epitaph memorialising the reconstruction of the Yunju Buddhist Monastery, written in 965 under the reign of Liao Muzong 穆宗 (r. 951-969), has already referred to the father of Empress Dowager

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<sup>67</sup> Tan, 'Lanling Xiaoshi shixi jiqi nanqian guli kaobian,' pp. 72-73.

<sup>68</sup> Yang Yinlou 杨荫楼, *Zhonggu shidai de Lanling Xiaoshi* 中古时代的兰陵萧氏 [The Lanling Xiao Lineage in the Middle Period] (Jinan: Shandong wenyi chubanshe, 2004), pp. 77-129.

<sup>69</sup> *LS*, 3:71.1198.

<sup>70</sup> Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 [New History of the Five Dynasties] (1073; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 3:72.898.

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Chengtian as the Lanling Duke.<sup>71</sup> This example illustrates that the connection between the Liao consort clan and Lanling and thus the historical Xiao family was established no later than that date.<sup>72</sup> Regardless of precise timing of the adoption of the surname, as Cai Meibiao argues after his investigation of textual and archaeological evidence, it seems that it was during the reign of Liao Jingzong 景宗 (r. 969-982) that Lanling began to appear systematically in our sources.<sup>73</sup>

Conforming to the standard structure of inscription writing outlined above, extant Sinitic tomb inscriptions show that consort members normally aligned their narrative of origin to the Western Zhou or the Han dynasty, which was in turn traceable to Huangdi. In some late tenth century tomb inscriptions written for Liao male subjects from the Han 韓 family, the home

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<sup>71</sup> Du Xingzhi, “Guanyu Liaodai waiqi Hanxing Xiaoshi youlai wenti de tantao” 关于辽代外戚汉姓萧氏由来问题的探讨 [On the Origin of the Han-style Xiao Surname of the Liao Dynasty], *Diyu wenhua yanjiu* 地域文化研究 (2018:03), pp. 90-96, p. 92. See “Chongxiu Fanyang Baidaishan Yunjusi bei” 重修范陽白帶山雲居寺碑 [Inscription on the Reconstruction of the Yunju Monastery at Baidai Mountain of Fanyang], in *Liaodai shike wenbian*, pp. 32-37, p.33.

<sup>72</sup> Du has argued that the adoption of Lanling should have happened after the adoption of the surname Xiao. Du, “Guanyu Liaodai waiqi Hanxing Xiaoshi,” p. 92. But I suggest we should be more cautious on the issue. The establishment of the connection between the historical Xiao family and the Liao consort clan possibly was not equivalent to the adoption of the Xiao surname. As will be addressed, in the Kitan language materials only the home of origin (Lanling) rather than the Xiao surname was adopted and presented by the Liao consort members. Therefore the Xiao surname and Lanling were separable in the Liao historical context, and in Sinitic sources there also exists a possibility that Lanling was adopted earlier than the Xiao surname by the consort members.

<sup>73</sup> For this point, see Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪, “Shishuo Liao Yel üshi Xiaoshi zhi youlai” 试说辽耶律氏萧氏之由来 [On Origins of the Liao Yel ü and Xiao Clans], *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 (1993:5), pp. 53-60, p. 57. It should be noticed that in the same page Cai has problematically dated the earliest use of Xiao by the Liao consort clan to the Jingzong era.

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of origin of their partners from the Xiao clan is already given as Lanling. For instance, Han Kuangsi's 韓匡嗣 tomb inscription records that "Mr. Han married [a member of] the Lanling Xiao clan, who was enfeoffed as the Lady of the Chen Princedom."<sup>74</sup> Many inscriptions from the eleventh century also present consort members as descended from the pre-Liao Xiao family, though most inscriptions are very short. For instance, an inscription written in 1033 for Xiao Lin 蕭琳 locates his homeland in Lanling, and briefly traces his lineage far back to Song Zhizi's enfeoffment at Xiao.<sup>75</sup> Another inscription for Xiao Fuyan 蕭福延 (written in 1070) offers a narrative which provides his ancestry since the Han dynasty: "[...], [his] style name [was] Qichang, [and his] ancestor was the descendant of the Prime Minister [...] of the Han dynasty. After the founding of the [Xiao] Liang [dynasty], his lineage was eminent and famous for generations."<sup>76</sup> At the end of the inscription, the text highlights his historical origin once more: "After the Prime Minister of the Han dynasty, [his descendants] were famous for their loyalty and filial piety. After the [reigns of] Liang emperors, his lineage became more prosperous. The roots were strong and the leaves flourished; the source was deep and the stream was long."<sup>77</sup>

Other inscriptions for consort members sometimes record their genealogical information in

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<sup>74</sup> "Han Kuangsi muzhi," p. 24. 公娶蘭陵蕭氏，封陳國夫人。

<sup>75</sup> "Xiao Lin muzhi" 蕭琳墓志 [The Tomb Inscription for Xiao Lin] in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 71-72, p. 71.

<sup>76</sup> See "Xiao Fuyan muzhi" 蕭福延墓志 [The Tomb Inscription for Xiao Fuyan] in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 131-33, p. 131. [...] 字其昌，其先漢相 [...] 之後。自梁帝開國而下，其後門閥顯赫，代有其人。

<sup>77</sup> "Xiao Fuyan muzhi," p. 132. 漢相而下，忠孝其彰。梁帝之後，世家益昌。本大葉茂，源深流長。

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both the Zhou and Han periods. For example, the tomb inscription for Xiao Degong 蕭德恭 (written in 1073) tells us that “His ancestor succeeded the enfeoffment of Yue[shu], and [his lineage] belonged to the Marquis of Zan [Xiao He].”<sup>78</sup> The recipient of the Xiao enfeoffment, Song Zhizi, is here mistaken as Yueshu 樂叔 – Song Zhizi’s forebear who had not dwelled at Xiao.<sup>79</sup> But it shows us that the inscription writer and of course the family of the deceased traced their ancestral history far back to the origin of the Xiao surname, and did not neglect to mention Xiao He, the most renowned figure in the history of the Xiao lineage.

In another inscription for Xiao Tang 蕭闡 (written in 1071), the narrative traces his ancestor precisely to Song Zhizi: “Mr. Xiao’s given name was Tang, and his style name was Pudali. His surname was Xiao and the origin was Lanling. His ancestor was Song Zhizi. [Because of] his enfeoffment at Xiao, [his clan] got the surname. Afterwards, his clan flourished and separated into different branches.”<sup>80</sup> This inscription further underlines the connection of his lineage with the Han dynasty and Lanling: “After the [first] king of Zhou established [his] kingdom, [he] only enfeoffed Yueshu; when [Han] Gaozu [Liu Bang] assessed the contributions [of his subjects], he repeatedly praised the strategies of Marquis Zan. When it comes to the Han Shizhong<sup>81</sup> [Xiao] Biao, he started to reside in Lanling and thus [his

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<sup>78</sup> See “Xiao Degong muzhi” 蕭德恭墓志 [The Tomb Inscription for Xiao Degong], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 153-55, p. 153. 其先襲樂之封，系鄭侯之族。

<sup>79</sup> Tan, “Lanling Xiaoshi shixi jiqi nanqian guli kaobian,” p. 72.

<sup>80</sup> See “Xiao Tang muzhi” 蕭闡墓志 [The Tomb Inscription for Xiao Tang] in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 135-37, p. 135. 公諱闡，字蒲打裏，姓蕭氏，蘭陵人也。其先本宋支子，食菜（采）於蕭，因以為氏。爾後子孫蕃衍，不一其族。

<sup>81</sup> Shizhong 侍中, President of the Department of the Imperial Chancellery.

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descendants] belonged to the Lanling lineage.”<sup>82</sup> This is a relatively detailed narrative of the Xiao genealogical history, which, as we have seen, also mentions Xiao Biao, due to whom Lanling became the *junwang* of the Xiao lineage. And in the inscription for Xiao Fuyan, one sentence is used to highlight the long history of the clan: “The roots stretched widely and the leaves spread extensively; the source was deep and the branches were long.”<sup>83</sup>

The many examples examined above reveal to us that members of the Liao consort clan, at least from the late tenth century onwards, had appropriated an ancestry with foreign origin into their origin myths. Figures such as Song Zhizi and Xiao He, though from outside the Liao dominion, could greatly extend the historical depth of the Liao consort clan, granting the Xiao members of Liao a prominent origin and glorious historical trajectory that matched those who ruled the neighbouring regimes. However, Sinitic and Kitan language materials diverge with regard to the consort clan’s surname. As is commonly known in the field of Liao studies, although members of the Liao consort clan all bore the surname Xiao in Sinitic, they were not of a single origin but in fact came from different clans. For instance, the empress of Abaoji, who bore the clan name of Shul ü, may have a Uighur origin. As Daniel Kane has pointed out, in materials written in Kitan we find no corresponding vocabulary for the Xiao surname recorded by Sinitic sources. Rather, what had been grouped under “Xiao” in Sinitic materials appear in Kitan sources by their individual clan names, such as Shul ü, Yishiji and

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<sup>82</sup> “Xiao Tang muzhi,” p. 135. 周王建社，獨開樂叔之封；高祖論功，復善鄴侯之略。迨乎漢侍中彪，始居蘭陵，則為蘭陵人也。

<sup>83</sup> “Xiao Tang muzhi,” p. 135. 枝分叶布，源深派长。

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Bali.<sup>84</sup>

But does this mean that the consort clan members constructed and presented for themselves a different ancestral genealogy in the Kitan discourse/context from in Sinitic ones? The answer seems to be negative. The Xiao name as it appears in Sinitic materials, and individual tribal names which appear in Kitan materials indeed suggest that in sources of different languages the consort clan presented themselves differently, one following Sinic tradition and the other steppe tradition. But these different ways of presenting their clan names does not change the perceived origin of the Liao consort clan. The perceived place of origin of the consort clan remained Lanling even in Kitan materials,<sup>85</sup> which means that in both Kitan and Sinitic sources the consort members treated themselves as descended from the same ancestry and also a “foreign” land. What differed was just the writing of their surname as “Xiao” or by the tribal clan names following different cultural traditions. As will be discussed later, the identical home of origin in materials in both languages and the discrepancy between how the clan names are written cannot be simply explained via sinicisation or nativism, behind which lies a “modern” discourse of the ethnic/national binary.

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<sup>84</sup> Daniel Kane, *The Kitan Language and Script*, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> Lanling in Kitan is also a loanword from Sinitic, written as 唃廛 in Kitan small script. See Chinggeltei et al., *Qidan xiaozi yanjiu*, p. 71.

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#### 4. Different presentations of Liao origins between the Liao sources and external sources

Another important issue concerning the Liao origin is the ways in which it was reinterpreted in sources written by outsiders (Song and Yuan historians). As will be discussed, scholars normally make at least two problematic assumptions about the issue. First, they consider the adoption of Huangdi by the Liao elite as the earliest ancestor an imitation of the Tuoba clan of the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534). Second, scholars tend to examine the structure of Liao origin narratives based on the *LS*. However, as we shall see, when it comes to the narrative structure of the origin myths, the many so-called official or standard Sinitic histories, including the *LS* and that for Northern Wei, differ greatly from constructions by the Liao elite of the tenth and eleventh centuries. These differences mirror two forms of dynastic legitimation.

Just like members of the Yelü clan, the Tuoba were of nomadic origin on the steppe, and are treated by historians as an ethnic group – Xianbei. According to the *WS*, in 386 Tuoba Gui reestablished the Dai Kingdom 代國 (338-376; 386) in present-day northern Shanxi and central Inner Mongolia, which was conquered in 376 by the Former Qin 前秦 (350-394). Later in the same year, Tuoba Gui changed the name of his regime from Dai to Wei in imitation of the Three Kingdoms Wei state established by Cao Pi 曹丕 (r. 220-226), and historians have prefixed Tuoba's Wei with "Northern" to distinguish it from that of the Cao family. In 398, Tuoba Gui located his capital at Pingcheng in northern Shanxi, and a year later declared his emperorship. Within half a century, Northern Wei had unified northern China,

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confronting the southern regimes with a perceived Han/Chinese origin centred around the Yangzi river basin.

We do not have much contemporary evidence from the early Northern Wei period about their claims of Huangdi origin, but according to the *WS*, the Tuoba clan constructed Huangdi as their first forebear, and saw themselves as the diaspora of the sage king. As we shall see in a later section, the *WS* shows a similar structure to the *LS* with regard to origin myths. It presents the Tuoba as the descendants of Huangdi in a place as prominent as the very first chapter of the annals for the imperial clan. As it claims, one grandson of Huangdi was the first ruler of the North (steppe areas), and was also the ancestor of the Tuoba:

In times of old, Huangdi had twenty-five sons. While some ruled inside the Central Kingdom, others ruled outside the Central Realm. The younger son of Changyi (the second son of Huangdi and his wife Leizu), was granted the northern area, and his state included the Great Xianbei Mountain, from which [the Xianbei people] got their name. His descendants were rulers for generations, dominating the north of Youdu, which was a wild area of great deserts...Huangdi ruled with the Virtue of Earth. It was a northern custom to call the earth *tuo*, and a descendant *ba*, therefore [ancestors of Northern Wei's ruling clan] took it (*Tuoba*) as [their] surname.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *WS*, 1:1.1. 昔黃帝有子二十五人，或內列諸華，或外分荒服。昌意少子，受封北土，國有大鮮卑山，因以爲號。其後，世爲君長，統幽都之北，廣漠之野...黃帝以土德王，北俗謂土爲托，謂後爲跋，故以爲氏。



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No earlier official histories had recorded the Xianbei as descendants of Huangdi, so the author of *WS* seemed to have felt a need to further explain this absence of records:

The Xianbei lived on livestock, migration and hunting, shaping unsophisticated and simple customs. [Thus they] did not have a writing system, only recording [information] by making scratches on wood. Stories about the past relied [only] on [the oral tradition of] individuals, which was like records made by historians.<sup>87</sup>

After this passage explaining the lack of physical records in the northern area, the *WS* further explains why the southern regimes in China proper, which did have well-developed historical writings, also lacked records about the Tuoba Xianbei:

Their descendant Shijun was once an official under Yao's authority, expelling Nüba to the north of the Ruo River. The people fed on his industry, and Yao praised him and ordered him to be the master of the fields. From the Three Ages to the Qin and Han periods, Xunyu, Xianyun, Shanrong and Xiongnu were brutal for generations and brought disasters to the Central Earth. However, the lineage of Shijun had no contact with southerners, therefore there are no records about them.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *WS*, 1:1.1. 畜牧遷徙，射獵爲業，淳樸爲俗，簡易爲化，不爲文字，刻木紀契而已。世事遠近，人相傳授，如史官之紀錄焉。

<sup>88</sup> *WS*, 1:1.1. 其裔始均，入仕堯世，逐女魃于弱水之北，民賴其勤，帝舜嘉之，命爲田祖。爰歷三代，以及秦漢，獯鬻、獫狁、山戎、匈奴之屬，累代殘暴，作害中州，而始均之裔，不交南夏，是以載籍無聞焉。

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In this end section, the author depicts a virtuous leader who had been praised by Yao.

Apparently paralleling this virtue, the account presents information that the ancestors of the Xianbei, unlike other nomads in the same region, had never invaded the Central Kingdom. And such a narrative, as Wang Ming-ke has also pointed out, cut off any connections between the Tuoba and other northern “barbarians.”<sup>89</sup> This *WS* narrative of the Tuoba origin thereby explains not only why there were no historical records by southerners, but also presents to readers the virtue of this clan and that there was no antagonism between the ancestors of the Tuoba and those who lived to their south, which offers a justification for the Tuoba’s rule in northern China from the fifth century.

There are similar structures of narrative to be found concerning the origins of the so-called non-Han peoples in the narrative of Liao origin in the *LS*, and many other Sinitic historical records. As Wang Ming-ke terms it, there is a paradigm called “stories of heroes’ migration to the frontiers” 英雄徙边记. Such narratives follow a basic structure: a preeminent figure moves to a remote foreign place, where he rules and civilises the natives and his descendants then also become rulers for generation after generation.<sup>90</sup> As mentioned, while the compilers of *LS* disagreed with Yelü Yan’s claim that Liao imperial clan were scions of Huangdi, they did trace their origin to another mythical sage king, Yandi:

After the age of [the sage king] Paoxi, scions of Yandi and Huangdi had been numerous.

Although the kings’ domains had their limits, the teaching of sages had no boundaries.

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<sup>89</sup> Wang, “Lun Panfu,” p. 600.

<sup>90</sup> Wang, *Yingxiong zuxian yu dixiong minzu*, p. 84.

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Therefore, most monarchs of the Four Directions were descendants of the two sages [Yandi and Huangdi] and were cognate with those who ruled the centre of the earth (Central Kingdoms). Via investigating the *Zhou shu*, Liao were the descendants of Yandi...<sup>91</sup>

As we can observe, in their structure both the Yel ü and Tuoba origin myths conform to the paradigm surmised by Wang. However, scholars tend to hold several problematical views concerning the above Liao narratives. For instance, Pierre Marsone has argued that to connect the Liao origin to Yandi rather than Huangdi shows a downgrading of Kitan prestige by Liao compilers.<sup>92</sup> Marsone does not explicitly explain his reasons for this argument, but the major reason seems to be, as Wang Ming-ke points out, that in the Sinitic historiography Yandi is defeated in his war with Huangdi, and mythical/historical figures of his descent usually appear as the defeated or exiled.<sup>93</sup> While it is true that in extant material many elite clans of both Han and non-Han origin prefer Huangdi over Yandi, purely to sideline the Kitan within historiography does not seem a convincing explanation for the choice of Yandi as ancestor of the Liao imperial clan. First, as is commonly known, the purpose for which the Mongol Yuan court had the *LS* compiled was because at the time the Liao dynasty was enshrined as one of the legitimate predecessors of Yuan itself (with Song and Jin another two). Therefore there was no reason for the compilers to undermine the historical prestige of Liao on purpose,

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<sup>91</sup> *LS*, 3:63.949. 庖犧氏降，炎帝氏、黃帝氏子孫衆多，王畿之封建有限，王政之布濩無窮，故君四方者，多二帝子孫，而自服土中者本同出也。考之宇文周之書，遼本炎帝之後...

<sup>92</sup> Marsone, *La Steppe et l'Empire*, p. 37.

<sup>93</sup> Wang, "Lun panfu," pp. 587-91; *Yingxiong zuxian yu dixiong minzu*, pp. 46-47, 157.

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especially considering their common origin as “northerners.”<sup>94</sup> Besides, the *LS* account was based on the compilers’ investigation of the *Zhou shu*, from which they claimed to have found what they considered to be more convincing historical connections between the Kitan and the Yuwen 宇文 Xianbei, and the latter was recorded in the same book as the descendants of Yandi. The *LS* also contains a specific and detailed chapter devoted to the genealogy of the Kitan which connects them to the Yuwen clan. This means that presenting Yandi as the ancestor of the Liao imperial clan was not something invented by Yuan compilers to degrade their prestige, but what were in the compilers’ eyes the “historical facts” following a dedicated investigation of pre-Liao sources.

Another issue is that many scholars believe the origin myths of the aforementioned Xianbei clans may have impacted the Liao elites’ choice of Huangdi as their ancestor.<sup>95</sup> This assumption is reasonable, considering that several clans labelled as Xianbei had appeared in pre-Liao Sinitic sources as descendants of Huangdi. But two issues warrant closer attention. The Yelü clan of Liao did not necessarily base their origin myths on earlier precedents because the practice of constructing sagely ancestors was common among other Eastern Eurasian elites *contemporary to* Liao, who may well have inspired the Yelü clan. Second, the Liao origin myth was considerably different to that of Xianbei in terms of narrative structure.

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<sup>94</sup> Hok-lam Chan, “Chinese Official Historiography at the Yuan Court: The Composition of the Liao, Chin, and Sung Histories” in John D. Langlois (ed.), *China Under Mongol Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 56-106; Liu Pujiang 刘浦江, “Deyun zhi zheng yu Liao Jin wangchao de zhengtong xing wenti” 德运之争与辽金王朝的正统性问题 [Debates on the Cycle of Five Elements and the Legitimacy of the Liao and Jin Dynasties], *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中国社会科学 (2004:2), pp. 189-203, pp. 198-200.

<sup>95</sup> Marsone, *La Steppe et l’Empire*, pp. 35-36.

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Marsone has argued that the Liao adoption of Huangdi ancestry was based on earlier sources which established connections between Huangdi and “northern barbarians” and the Xianbei, in particularly the *WS* account.<sup>96</sup> Zhao Yongchun similarly assumes that one important reason for the Liao adoption of Huangdi was because the Liao imperial elite considered themselves to be descended from Xianbei and were aware that the Xianbei appeared in pre-Liao sources as descended from Huangdi, and therefore the Liao elite laid claim to ancestry from Huangdi.<sup>97</sup> These scholarly assumptions have reconstructed the Huangdi ancestry of the Yelü clan through the intermediary of the origin myths of the Xianbei clans. But as will be discussed, this does not seem accurate.

For instance, as outlined above, in the *WS* accounts, the ancestors of the Tuoba clan had little contact with northern China regimes since the enfeoffment of Huangdi’s grandson. They appear in records as northerners isolated from the northern China dynasties for generations. Indeed, the author of *WS* seems to attempt to convince readers that this isolation meant that the forebears of Tuoba had never violated or invaded the Central Kingdom, but such isolation also implies that the clan, which began to compete with other powers during the fourth century, had no historical roots in northern China. The Tuoba clan appears in the *WS* simply as a long lost diaspora who had now returned home. More importantly, this means that following their forebears’ enfeoffment and migration to the northern realm, they had no more imperial tradition or history in the Central Kingdom prior to the Northern Wei era.

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<sup>96</sup> Marsone, *La Steppe et l’Empire*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>97</sup> Zhao, “Shilun Liaoren de ‘Zhongguo’ guan,” pp. 78-80.

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In marked contrast, the Yel ü clan presented themselves as a lineage in possession of a long dynastic and imperial tradition, with deep roots in the Central Kingdom. They appear in Liao period records as connected to the Zhou and Han royal houses and as a clan which had long enjoyed the high levels of prestige in history. This constructed long tradition/history based in the Central Kingdom implies that their nobility had continued for thousands of years. This paradigm of narrative thus greatly enhances the historical depth and richness of the Yel ü clan much more than in the case of Tuoba recorded in the *WS*.

Equally importantly, the Yel ü clan seem never to have treated themselves as a diaspora. In narratives regarding the origin of the Tuoba clan and many other non-Han elite families of the fourth and fifth centuries, they saw themselves as a diaspora group who then returned to their original home in the Central Kingdom, and a noble and remote origin was constructed primarily in order to justify their contemporary dominance in northern China. Unlike the Tuoba, who had long appeared in sources as “outsiders,” for Liao a long imperial past in northern China meant that the forebears of the Liao imperial clan had long been a “native” elite within the Central Kingdom. However, in the tenth century the Liao elite were able to establish a stable and organised empire centred on the steppe institutionally similar to their Sinic neighbours, dominating both the pastoral and sowing regions. Liao did not dominate the whole of northern China but only a small northern fringe of it. The Yel ü clan saw themselves not as the lost descendants of sages who then returned to their “ancestral home,” but explorers and “travellers” who did not aim to return. They moved to a remote area and settled in that new land outside the Central Kingdom. Therefore, if the Tuoba’s origin myth recorded

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in the *WS* demonstrates a structure of narrative which is “centripetal” – diaspora group who returned home to the Central Kingdom after a long settlement outside, that of Yel ü was “centrifugal” – “native” families of the Central Kingdom who now had migrated outside their place of origin and settled in a new land.

As will be discussed in the next section, despite having constructed long historical imperial roots within the Central Kingdom, what the Liao imperial clan needed was not a Han/Chinese origin to legitimise their domination of northern China, or any ambition to return their perceived home of origin in the heartland of Han dynasty, but a foreign as well as noble past which provided them with political, social and cultural prestige. This Huangdi origin, borrowed from outside the Liao native cultural domain was exploited by the Liao imperial clan primarily to enhance their legitimacy at home, and to permit them to rival ruling clans of neighbouring regimes in terms of bloodline, which in this multistate world justified their very existence.<sup>98</sup>

## **5. The significance of foreign origins: ethnic identification or a distant past to glorify the present?**

It is common to see the ruling families of traditional societies worldwide presenting

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<sup>98</sup> The constructed genealogy of the Liao consort clan could be understood in a similar manner. Although the remote ancestors recorded in their tomb inscriptions are normally figures of the Zhou and Han periods, these historical figures as appeared in Sinitic historiography are also descendants of Huangdi. Compared with the Liao imperial clan, the consort clan had even constructed for themselves a much longer history as “southerners”: the Xiao clan had enjoyed great fames in the Zhou and Han periods, and also provided the ruling houses of the Qi and Liang dynasties.

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themselves or being presented as possessing a much earlier origin than they actually had. This has been termed as “genealogical parasitism” by David P. Henige.<sup>99</sup> The input of a more distant history of origin for the native ruling families also meant that the origin was normally something non-native – and borrowed from the outside, and unavailable within the local society and discourse. As Marshall Sahlins points out in her article “The Stranger King,” in many societies their rulers “have been strangers to the places and people they rule. By their dynastic origins and their inherited nature...they are foreigners.”<sup>100</sup> For instance, sultans of the fifteenth century Islamic regime Malacca traced their ancestry to Alexander the Great. Another example is presented by three seals affixed to an eighteenth-century edict of a Minangkabau sultan, which demonstrates that the sultan considered himself cognate with “sultans” of Rum (i.e. Istanbul or Rome) and of China, all descended from Alexander the Great.<sup>101</sup>

It is not appropriate to explain these examples via the framework of ethnicity. To be descended from Alexander the Great was hardly a sign of Hellenisation or identification with Greeks. And to be cognate with monarchs of Rum and China was clearly not a claim to identify with natives in Rum or China. All these claims simply served the purpose of enhancing the legitimacy of the ruling clans within their local societies rather than switching ethnic identification with another ethnic group. This borrowing of ancestry from outside local

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<sup>99</sup> David P. Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 51-55.

<sup>100</sup> Sahlins, “The Stranger-King,” p. 178.

<sup>101</sup> Sahlins, “The Stranger-King,” p. 181.



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society was a political and cosmological matter, which distinguished rulers with “foreign” origins from the natives.<sup>102</sup> As Helms has pointed out, foreign elements represented things irregular and unknown to the locals.<sup>103</sup> The mastery of this “esoteric knowledge” identified an elite group, legitimised “their status, power, and authority,” and distanced them from the ruled.<sup>104</sup> That is, this adoption of non-native elements, for instance a foreign origin, was the demonstration of an elite status. In many cases it was concerned with one’s position in the political/social hierarchy and cosmological order, rather than always a differentiation between ethnic groups/identities.<sup>105</sup>

For the Liao case, I argue that the Liao ruling families’ utilisation of Huangdi origin indicates what they valued was a historical depth their native society could not offer, and a borrowed “foreign” ancestry which could enable them to be universally connected to an cross-border ruling stratum separable from the ruled. As discussed earlier, interactions between groups bearing Han and non-Han categories have been mostly studied as ethnic encounters.

Huangdi’s lineage, like those of other ancient sages, were attractive to the ruling clans of many states in Eastern Eurasian history, but it is problematic to always treat the borrowing of ancestry from the so-called Han/Chinese by non-Han/Chinese groups as an ethnic issue. It is not a case of redefining ethnicity in historical periods. Rather, the ethnic discourse is simply

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<sup>102</sup> Sahlin, “The Stranger-King,” pp. 183-84.

<sup>103</sup> Helms, *Ulysses’ Sail*, p. 13.

<sup>104</sup> Helms, *Ulysses’ Sail*, pp. 11, 13.

<sup>105</sup> Of course, sometimes there are correlations between ethnic identities and social/political class, but they are clearly two different concepts and their correlations are contextual. On ethnicity and class, see Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), pp. 3-7.

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irrelevant to the discussion and cannot serve as an analytical concept which provides satisfactory explanation in this case.

As can be observed from the sources we have discussed, what is normally underscored by the Liao ruling clans was the long history and the nobility of their ancestry. For instance, the records about Abaoji's preference of Liu Bang and Xiao He mention nothing about ethnic identity. In an earlier section we discussed the questions asked by Abaoji to Liao officials, which were about in the age of antiquity "who was the [most] wise and valiant emperor" and who was the "best among his officials." The questions show that where Abaoji's interest lay, or at least where his interest was believed to lie, were one's noble status as emperor and prime minister, and the prestige and personal charisma demonstrated by the emperor's wisdom and valour, minister's qualified competence, and of course also their historical roots in remote antiquity. It is these attributes that the Liao side emphasised and was, as mentioned above, known to Song envoys concerning the Liao ruling clans' origins.

In addition, what Liao tomb inscriptions normally emphasise is also the long history and nobility of the origin of the deceased rather than an ethnic change or identification with another ethnic group. For example, after noting her place of origin at Lanling, the aforementioned 1009 inscription for Lady Xiao stresses that: "The lady inherited the ancestral prosperity. The lineage has been flourishing for hundreds of generations. It originated from the branch of Jade Trees and from the tributaries of Silver River."<sup>106</sup> "Hundreds of

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<sup>106</sup> "Xiaoshi furen muzhi," p. 47. 夫人惟一以繼體永祧之茂，本枝百代之繁，泊玉樹分柯，銀河析派。

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generations” highlights the longevity and historical depth of the Xiao clan of Liao, and both Jade Trees (玉樹 *yushu*) and Silver River (*yinhe* 銀河 or *yinhuang* 銀潢), mythical and auspicious objects with much earlier Sinitic textual origins, in this context represents the nobility of the Xiao lineage. Another example is found in the inscription for Xiao Tang written in 1038. After outlining the elite status the Xiao ancestors had enjoyed in the Zhou and Han dynasties, it emphasises the Xiao clan’s “branches reached out and leaves spread. The source is deep and the tributaries are long.”<sup>107</sup>

On the one hand, the concepts such as Silver River and Jade Tree are all found in much earlier Sinitic materials as mythical objects and thus they themselves are of a long textual history/tradition. On the other hand, the frequent use of such rhetoric demonstrates the popularity of and intention to employ classical expressions and concepts to justify one’s origin in the composition of inscriptions, which symbolised their noble past. Besides, the Liao elite’s long “roots” in the distant past were not only expressed by literary description, but also by the history and classical background attached to such allusive rhetoric used for writing inscriptions - the terms can and could not be understood immediately unless the reader has knowledge of the story behind it.<sup>108</sup>

What is equally important is that despite having a constructed descent from Huangdi, the boundaries between Kitan and Han remained, which means the change in constructed ancestry was irrelevant to any ill-defined ethnic identity and did not lead to an identification

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<sup>107</sup> “Xiao Tang muzhi,” p. 135. 枝分葉布，源深派長。

<sup>108</sup> Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy*, p. 79.

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with the Han identity. There was a concise discussion of these boundaries in the first section of this chapter, nevertheless a brief comparison of Liao with the history of Northern Wei will serve well to clarify my point. During the reign of the seventh emperor, Tuoba Hong 拓跋宏 (r. 471-499), the Northern Wei court launched a set of comprehensive reforms (normally phrased as Signification Reform). In 494, Tuoba Hong moved the capital from Pingcheng, located in present-day northern Shanxi, to Luoyang of Henan 河南 province in central China, which had been the heartland of previous great empires like Han and Tang.<sup>109</sup> After the relocation of the capital city, Tuoba Hong ordered that many aspects of the Xianbei native customs be changed. For instance, those who relocated to Luoyang had to alter their place of origin from Dai of northern Shanxi to Luoyang, and it was compulsory to be buried at Luoyang.<sup>110</sup> Besides, Tuoba Hong ordered Han attire to be worn, replacing Xianbei traditional clothes, which were banned.<sup>111</sup> In addition, Xianbei language was abandoned in court communications under orders.<sup>112</sup> Xianbei officials who were under 30 had to speak Chinese at court, and speech in the Xianbei language would result in demotion.<sup>113</sup> Accompanying these language policies, Xianbei surnames and given names were also to be changed into Han ones. The imperial clan used “Yuan” 元 in place of their native “Tuoba.”<sup>114</sup> The central aim of these reforms, as Chen Yinke points out, was to transform

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<sup>109</sup> WS, 1:7.175.

<sup>110</sup> WS, 1:7.178; 2:20.527-28.

<sup>111</sup> WS, 1:7.176.

<sup>112</sup> WS, 1:7.177.

<sup>113</sup> WS, 2:21.536.

<sup>114</sup> On surnames, see WS, 1:7.179; 8:113.3005-15. On changes in given names, see Wan Shengnan 万绳楠 (ed.), *Chen Yingke Wei Jin Nan-Bei chao jiangyanlu* 陈寅恪魏晋南北朝讲演录 [Records of Chen Yinke's Lectures on the Periods of Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties] (Hefei: Huangshan

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Xianbei aristocrats into Han-style educated elite.<sup>115</sup>

Another thing that signified the shift of identity was the finalisation of the decision on the representative element for the Northern Wei. During the reign of Tuoba Hong, intense discussions resulted in the court deciding that Earth should be chosen as the representative element for Northern Wei, following Metal for Western Jin which had dominated the China proper between the middle of the third and the early fourth century. The choice of Earth in succession to Metal of Western Jin not only demonstrated Northern Wei's ambition to compete with the remnants of the Jin court (which had relocated in south China due to rebellions and nomadic intrusions) as the sole legitimate successors of Western Jin, but also represented their effort to cut off Northern Wei's connections with regimes with nomadic origins which had been established in northern China between Western Jin and Northern Wei.<sup>116</sup>

The reforms undertaken by Tuoba Hong feature many aspects of ethnic change. They facilitated certain number of Xianbei aristocrats to identify themselves with not just "Han" culture but apparently also something similar to, according to modern definitions, Han ethnic identity. However, in the case of Liao, during the course of their entire dynasty history, there were no intensive reforms similar to those Tuoba Hong put in place. Rather, the binaries

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shushe, 1987), pp. 258-60.

<sup>115</sup> Wan, *Chen Yingke Wei Jin Nan-Bei chao jiangyanlu*, p. 255. On above reforms during the reign of Tuoba Hong, see Wan, *Chen Yingke Wei Jin Nan-Bei chao jiangyanlu*, pp. 254-67.

<sup>116</sup> Luo Xin 罗新, "Shiliu guo Beichao deyun" 十六国北朝德运 [On the Cosmic Agents of the Sixteen Kingdoms and Northern Dynasties], *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中国史研究 (2004:3), pp. 47-56, pp. 52-56.

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between Kitan and Han continued to exist. Besides the boundaries that were outlined in the first section, a variety of policies and institutional divisions were imposed on the tribal and sedentary sections, which maintained the boundaries between the Kitan and Han during the Liao period. For instance, the central government was divided into Southern and Northern sections, dealing with the affairs of Han and Kitan (also between other perceived nomadic and sedentary groups) separately. This was also true of local administration, which was a combination of prefectures and tribal organisations. Other aspects, such as the system for the selection of officials, law and the implementation of legislature, and military organisation, are also marked by dichotomisation. Cultural elements of the elite and population labelled as Han did indeed have an impact on the Kitan's, but this impact was limited and the adoption was selective or modified.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, many Kitan native customs were well preserved. For example, the tribal region remained the centre of Liao political power,<sup>118</sup> and following the nomadic lifestyle the political centre of the Liao Empire was largely defined by a moving court rather than a walled capital - emperors and certain officials moved seasonally, with state affairs discussed and decided in the moving court, with different activities such as hunting conducted there according to seasons.<sup>119</sup> Besides, native religious beliefs and practices remained important on many occasions, such as sacrifices to heaven and mountains, the ritual

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<sup>117</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng have made extensive discussions in their *History of Chinese Society: Liao*.

<sup>118</sup> Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*, p. 5.

<sup>119</sup> On the Liao moving court and their seasonal moving, see for instance, Yang Jun 杨军 and Wang Chengming, "Liaodai Nabo kao" 辽代捺钵考 [On the Liao Seasonal Moving], *Anhui shixue* 安徽史学 (2017:2), pp. 39-46; Yang Jun 杨军, "Liaodai Nabo santi" 辽代捺钵三题 [Three Issues Concerning the Liao Seasonal Moving], *Shixue jikan* 史学集刊 (2016:3), pp. 147-54.

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of rebirth, and the accession ceremony of Liao imperial rulers.<sup>120</sup> If compared with the reform undertaken by Tuoba Hong in particular, the Kitan language, the two scripts, and clothing customs, were never ordered to be abandoned, and on the contrary there are many instances of those categorised as Han being influenced by the so-called Kitan culture and way of life. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the imperial family also retained their surname of tribal origin, and for the consort clan the Xiao surname appears only in Sinitic and is absent in Kitan materials. There is no reason to see the ruling families of Liao as aligning themselves with the Han identity. As discussed, changes to the social memories of ancestry and home of origin had occurred and were internalised as an important part of their past, demonstrated explicitly by tomb inscriptions. But I argue the foreign origins were attractive to Liao ruling clans not because the borrowed ancestral figures had a Han identity, but rather because they were seen as mythical figures who were powerful and prestigious. In the Liao context, this had nothing to do with the ethnic discourse.

The above discussion of Liao in turn casts doubt on the assumption that the adoption of the Huangdi origin by the Tuoba clan was a sign of identification with the Han identity.

According to the *WS*, in 398 the first emperor of Northern Wei Tuoba Gui proclaimed their origin to be Huangdi,<sup>121</sup> while the reforms by Tuoba Hong took place around one hundred years after this recorded recognition of Huangdi as Tuoba clan's forebear. This could mean

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<sup>120</sup> See for instance, Zhang Bibo 张碧波, "Qidanzu saman wenhua lun: Zhongguo beifang minzu saman wenhua lun zhiyi" 契丹族萨满文化论—中国北方民族萨满文化论之一 [Shamanist Culture of the Kitan: On the Shamanism of China's Northern Ethnic Minorities], *Zongjiao yu minzu* 宗教与民族 4 (2004), pp. 152-91.

<sup>121</sup> *WS*, 8:108.2734.

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that the change in ancestry narrative was treated by the Tuoba clan as separable from other elements which served as indicators of Han identity, and was not equivalent to a change which would loosen the boundaries between the Xianbei (which included the Tuoba) and the Han elites. In the early period of the Northern Wei dynasty, as conquerors it seems implausible that the Tuoba members would locate their remote ancestor as one whose ownership lay in the hands of the conquered Han subjects. As scholars have noted, although the cultures categorised as Han already had influenced the various Xianbei elites at the early stages of Northern Wei, their so-called sinification had, prior to Tuoba Hong's reign, generally been "unconscious." In contrast, as Chen Yinke argues, the power of "anti-sinification" among Xianbei aristocrats was strong. It was this resistance to sinification - a term which according to Chen's definition primarily denotes the assimilation by/to the educated elite categorised as Han - that in his view was "conscious."<sup>122</sup> By modifying and furthering this argument for both the Tuoba elite of early Northern Wei and the two Liao ruling clans, I would contend that the reason for the "unconscious" adoption of certain elements categorised by scholars as Han/Chinese may well also be due to the un-ethnicised nature of such cultural elements. The Huangdi origin, for instance, could be better understood as something not associated with any particular ethnic group but with a universal elite stratum, which was ancient and prestigious, and useful and convenient for enhancing the legitimacy and historical legacy of the ruling clans. The adoption of a remote and sagely ancestry was not perceived by the non-Han elites as equivalent to a commitment to a Han identity.

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<sup>122</sup> Wan, *Chen Yingke Wei Jin Nan-Bei chao jiangyanlu*, pp. 240-53.



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Of course, in some cases a certain historical figure may have been seen as someone exclusively owned by the Han group. For instance, by and during the Tang dynasty, within the Tang districts there had been a large number of residents with foreign origins, many of whom also gained elite status and served the Tang court. Histories and unearthed tomb inscriptions show that a large proportion of these had traced their ancestry back to ancient sages such as Huangdi, a figure at the time possibly perceived by tomb owners and their families as a “Han” sage.<sup>123</sup> For example, after the devastating rebellion led by An Lushan who was of Central Asian origin, there appeared an anti-foreign tendency within the Tang Empire, which led to the hatred and even slaughter of those with foreign backgrounds.<sup>124</sup> In response to this anti-foreign sentiment many residents with foreign origins changed their ancestry and origin to ancient sages such as Huangdi.<sup>125</sup> These changes were usually accompanied by a change of surname,<sup>126</sup> which as Ebrey points out normally carried the function of indicating shared ancestors.<sup>127</sup> The changes under the period of xenophobia after the catastrophic rebellion indicate attempts by foreigners to ease the tension between “us” and “other,” and shows that for these residents Huangdi was a figure pertaining to a concrete ethnic-like “other” group. This other group was less defined or understood through the notion of hierarchy or class, and more in ethnic sense, because the priority lying behind surname

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<sup>123</sup> Ma Chi 马驰, “Lun shi Tang fanren zhi Hanhua” 论仕唐蕃人之汉化 [On the Sinicisation of the Foreigners Serving in the Tang Dynasty], *Tangshi luncong* 唐史论丛 7 (1998), pp. 155-80, p. 165.

<sup>124</sup> Rong Xinjiang 荣新江, *Zhonggu Zhongguo yu Sute wenming* 中古中国与粟特文明 [Medieval China and Sogdian Culture] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2014; reprinted 2015), pp. 80-84.

<sup>125</sup> Rong, *Zhonggu Zhongguo yu Sute wenming*, p. 85.

<sup>126</sup> Rong, *Zhonggu Zhongguo yu Sute wenming*, pp. 86-88.

<sup>127</sup> Ebrey, “Surnames and Han Chinese Identity,” p. 21.

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changes and ancestral memory in this context was not to promote their social status and prestige but to conceal markers of their foreign identities in order to escape anti-foreign sentiment. Cases like this may be explained within a so-called “instrumentalist” framework<sup>128</sup> – that realistic political purposes led the Tang residents with foreign origins to change their ancestry and identification.

Other situations may also have led those with foreign origins to perceive certain elements like a Huangdi origin as exclusively “Han.” For instance, scholars have discussed the primordial aspect of the identification with one group, pointing out one’s “primordial attachment” to “assumed givens” within a community one was born and raised, such as the “cultural interpretation of descent.”<sup>129</sup> Within Sinic empires the long contact with the majority labelled as Han may have resulted in identification with this majority and also with their narratives of origin.<sup>130</sup> As for those of foreign origin, ethnic minorities, or minor groups living in the frontiers, termed by Wang Ming-ke as those on the “geopolitical peripheries,” there may have been anxiety about their identities.<sup>131</sup> One instance would be the elite of the Shu region during the Han dynasty, where the territory of the Shu Kingdom had been annexed by the Qin state and inherited by the Han dynasty. This group constructed a ancestry from Yu 禹, a descendant of Huangdi.<sup>132</sup> Peripheral to the political, social, and geographical centre of the

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<sup>128</sup> Abner Cohen, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); Despres, “Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Guyanese Society,” pp. 87-117.

<sup>129</sup> Geertz, “The Integrative Revolution,” pp. 105-57. Keyes, “The Dialectics of Ethnic Change,” pp. 4-30.

<sup>130</sup> Ma Chi, “Lun shi Tang fanren zhi Hanhua,” pp. 165-67.

<sup>131</sup> Wang, “Lun Panfu,” p. 597.

<sup>132</sup> Wang, “Lun Panfu,” pp. 596-98.

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empire, the Shu elite faced discrimination by the Han elite.<sup>133</sup> In this case, the native Shu elite were faced with a strong presence of a dominant and self-conscious aristocratic stratum who identified themselves as *Huaxia* (Han). For the Shu elite, the *Huaxia* (Han) aristocratic clans were associated with a unified and powerful empire. They possessed a hegemonic cultural discourse and collectively identified themselves as having noble origins traceable to sages of antiquity. As Wang suggests, the crisis of identity of the Shu elite largely resulted in their willingness to claim a Yu origin to underscore their Han identity rather than retain a “barbarian” identity.<sup>134</sup> In this case Yu was understood by the Shu elite as a figure of the hegemonic Han group. Huangdi’s lineage and his descendant Yu, clearly have an ethnic character, being tied to a concrete, tangible, unified “other” group in ethnic-like sense. The otherness of Huangdi origin as something belonging to another ethnic group (Han) was likely felt, so to descend from Huangdi might be less a marker of elite identity or class than an ethnic Han identity in this case.

But in the tenth century, with regard to historical context, the Liao elite faced a very different scene, which unlike the previous cases, could not lead them to associate a sage and remote ancestry with a concrete Han “other.” First, Liao had maintained political boundaries with those whose ruling elite were predominately Han/Chinese. Liao was not part of a Sinic empire like Central Asian residents in Tang and the Shu elite in the Han dynasty, but a new state emerging from the Tang northern frontier. The aim behind Liao ruling families adopting a Huangdi ancestry thus was clearly not to conceal the distinctiveness of their native identity

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<sup>133</sup> Wang, “Lun Panfu,” p. 597.

<sup>134</sup> Wang, “Lun Panfu,” p. 597.

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and cultural features in order to better position themselves within a Sinic empire, but for local purposes: to build up their own political legitimacy as an independent power from others.

Second, the contact of the Liao native elite with the Han elite and population was limited.

Liao was not a regime entirely built upon or born of previous territories of a Sinic empire.

Rather, it was an ecologically and economically distinct Sinic area which became part of Liao in 938. This area provided the Liao court with an elite group most of whom were of Sinic origin, but it was merely the small southern fringe of the empire and was not acquired by conquest but was awarded for Liao's military assistance to Later Jin. The native nomadic population remained mostly separate from the Han and was thus not overwhelmingly surrounded by the Han. Compared with regimes such as the Sixteen Kingdoms and Northern Wei centred within China proper, the Liao native elite's contact with Han was therefore limited. As mentioned previously, the boundaries between Han and Kitan were consciously preserved, and the steppe region remained the Liao power centre.

Third, Liao was not faced with a unified "other" power. There was a group of people labelled by the Liao native elite as Han, but the Han were merely a part of their contemporary world.

One could argue that the Song dynasty was a unified Han ethnic other for Liao, but in doing so the following several points deserve a closer look. Song was established almost half a century after Liao and was also born from a multi-state system. Liao only formally acknowledged Song as *the* only equal after the conclusion of the Chanyuan Treaty in 1005.

That means Song was not originally a targeted "Han" other for the Liao elite to confront, but

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simply a latecomer which grew out of and eventually successfully unified most of Liao's many former post-Tang neighbours of various origins. Song was one victorious political power but not the only regime that grew out of the post-Tang multistate world. Besides, as we have discussed, the Liao adoption of an ancient sagely ancestry was underway *before* Song unified most of Tang territories as a unified empire. This means the adoption of a Huangdi origin was conducted in a multistate context and the origin was not monopolised by one particularly outstanding and powerful "other" community. In short, by the time Song became a power which could not be ignored by Liao, the many Sinic elements had already been long introduced into Liao and neutralised as universal legacies, internalised as part of Liao society itself. Song was simply another state that shared in many these ancient treasures, just as did Liao and its many post-Tang neighbours.

In addition, the label of "Han" during the Liao period was not precisely used to refer to those under Song domination, but rather vaguely denoted those from northern China in the tenth century and then those of the Sixteen Prefectures under Liao domination. That meant that Song was simply a political other, but not necessarily an ethnic other representing the Han. And of course, there was in fact more than one political other for Liao. Although the Song elite during the eleventh century shaped an idea of the existence of a cross-border greater Han community,<sup>135</sup> throughout the Liao period there was no such a "Han" country or universal community for the Liao elite.

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<sup>135</sup> See Nicolas Tackett, *The Origin of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), Part II Cultural Space.

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In short, Liao did not exist in a world shaped by a political dichotomy between a Han/Chinese state and a “barbarian” state, nor one between a steppe regime and a unified agrarian state. From the time Abaoji held power and even long before it, the outer world which interacted with the Kitan society was not one unified, centralised, strong Han/Chinese empire which provided a clear target for either identification with or to fight. Instead, it was one of multiple states which together shared many common legacies. Many cultural elements and states were not one-to-one relationships. No single state monopolised any single one of these legacies.

### **To achieve differences through a common ground**

As we have seen above, scholars generally treat the adoption of Huangdi origin by Liao ruling families as an indicator of their ethnic identification with Han/Chinese. But to frame the issue of constructed origin using an ethnic binary between Han and non-Han risks overlooking and misunderstanding the varied functions of a constructed common ancestor. I do not deny that the adoption of a Huangdi ancestry highlights the similarities between non-Han and Han, but in different circumstances such an alteration of non-Han native ancestry was for the sake of different purposes, especially when it came to groups which maintained political independence from Sinic empires.

It is worth while to briefly take the regimes and elite of northern Vietnam as an example in comparison with Liao. A collection of stories named *Lĩnh Nam chích quĩ liệt truyện* was

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annotated during the fifteenth-century Lê dynasty (1428-1527) by a Lê court official Vũ Quỳnh 武瓊 (1453-1516).<sup>136</sup> In the first chapter, “Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan,” the narrative begins with what modern historians may call a “Chinese” figure – Yandi, the Fire Lord, and traces the origin of “Viet” 越 to Yandi.<sup>137</sup> Vũ Quỳnh clearly does not deny this claim, because he neither edited this information out nor contended it. In fact, in the preface he acknowledges that “ ‘Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan’ details the beginning of Imperial Viet,”<sup>138</sup> thus treating Yandi as part of the Viet’s own history. Also in his preface, Vũ Quỳnh considers the “Viet” to be an independent historical entity and imperial force, conveyed via expressions such as “Our Viet was in the zone of Yaohuang (要荒 countries of wildness), therefore the historical records [about us] are few.”<sup>139</sup> In Sinic traditions, Yaohuang referred to “barbarian” areas remote from the cultural influence of the Sinic world, and thus the treatment of “Viet” as a Yaohuang regime indicated that the author(s) wished to present it as a separate power beyond the reaches of Sinic empires. And the usage of “Imperial Viet” also clearly demonstrates an appeal by Viet elite to an imperial past comparable to their northern

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<sup>136</sup> Vũ Quỳnh 武瓊, *Lĩnh Nam chí quĩ liệt truyện* (Viet.)/*Lingnan zhiguai liezhuan* (Ch.) 嶺南摭怪列傳 [Arrayed Tales of Selected Oddities from South of the Passes], in Dai Kelai 戴可来, Yang Baoyun 杨保筠, and Wu Shiying 武世营 (eds.), *Lingnan zhiguai deng shiliao sanzong* 嶺南摭怪等史料三种 [Three Historical Sources: Including *Lingnan zhiguai*] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1991). On the *Lĩnh Nam chí quĩ liệt truyện* and for the translation of the title, see Liam C. Kelley, “Inventing Traditions in Fifteenth-Century Vietnam,” in Victor Mair and Liam C. Kelley (eds.), *Imperial China and Its Southern Neighbours* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2015), pp. 161-93.

<sup>137</sup> *Lĩnh Nam chí quĩ liệt truyện*, 1.9.

<sup>138</sup> Vũ Quỳnh (ed.), “*Lĩnh Nam chí quĩ liệt truyện tự*/Lingnan zhiguai liezhuan xu” 嶺南摭怪列傳序 [Preface of the Arrayed Tales of Selected Oddities from South of the Passes], in *Lĩnh Nam chí quĩ liệt truyện*, p. 3. 《鴻龐氏傳》是詳之皇越開創之由。

<sup>139</sup> Vũ, “*Lĩnh Nam chí quĩ liệt truyện tự*,” p. 3. 然我越乃古要荒之地，故記載又略之也。

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Sinic neighbours.

Similar constructions can be found in the *Đại Việt sử ký toản thư*, an official history whose compilation began in the fifteenth century and was finalised in the eighteenth.<sup>140</sup> As Liam C. Kelley points out, in fact the initial writer of *Đại Việt sử ký toản thư*, Ngô Sĩ Liên 吳士連, had already incorporated the “Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan” from the *Lĩnh Nam chích quĩ liệt truyện* into his history, including the latter’s constructed genealogy from Yandi.<sup>141</sup> But Ngô Sĩ Liên, like Vũ Quỳnh, provides a two-fold idea regarding the identity of the “Viet.” In his preface to the work, he writes:

Histories were aimed to record events. The gains and losses observed from these events can provide lessons for the future. The coexisting states in ancient times [of Spring and Autumn era] had their individual histories. For instances, Lu had *Chunqiu*, Jin had *Taowu*, and Chu had *Sheng*. Great Viet is located south of the Five Passes, and it is the heaven which separates the North and South. The forebear of Viet was descended from Shennong [Yandi] and was the real master installed by the heaven, because of which [we] and Northern Dynasties could each set up imperial orders in different places.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ngô Sĩ Liên 吳士連, *Đại Việt sử ký toản thư/Da Yue shiji quanshu* 大越史記全書 [Complete Book of the Historical Records of Đại Việt] (Chongqing: Xi’nan daxue chubanshe, 2015). The translation of the title is from Liam C. Kelley, “The Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan as a Medieval Vietnamese Invented Tradition,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 7.2 (2012), pp. 87-130, p. 88.

<sup>141</sup> Kelley, “Inventing Traditions in Fifteenth-Century Vietnam,” p. 166; Kelley, “The Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan,” p. 88.

<sup>142</sup> *Đại Việt sử ký ngoại kỷ toàn thư tự* 大越史記外紀全書序 [Preface of the Extended Annals of the Complete Book of the Historical Records of Đại Việt], in *Đại Việt sử ký toản thư*, p. 7. 史以記事也，而事



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By setting up a common background that in ancient times the various coexisting states all had their own histories, this preface places this history of Great Viet within that tradition, indicating that Great Viet as an independent state deserved its own historical record. The Five Passes, south of which lay the Great Viet, was regarded as a geographical barrier set by Heaven to separate North (Sinic empires) and South (Viet regimes). This is used to justify the independent existence of Viet as a heavenly granted fact. But what contributed to the Viet's concurrent existence alongside the North was not only its geographical location, but also its heavenly blessed noble origins. The forebears of Viet were seen as descended from Yandi and were interpreted as rulers chosen by the heaven. The two factors of the geographical barrier and noble origins from Yandi, both of which involved heavenly blessings, contributed in a major way to the perceived maintenance of a separate imperial power of Viet equivalent to the North.

As we can see from this preface, the claim of descent from Yandi was never an indicator of identification with North and with the group labelled by modern scholars as Han or Chinese. Rather, it presented a sense of confrontation between the North and South and the separation and independence of the Viet from the North. The claim to have a Yandi origin indeed shows that the North and South had something in common. However, this common origin was employed to qualify Viet as a historical and contemporary political and cultural entity no

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之得失為將來之鑒戒。古者列國各有史，如魯之春秋、晉之擣杙、楚之乘是已，大越居五嶺之南，乃天限南北也。其始祖出於神農氏之後，乃天啟真主也，所以能與北朝各帝一方焉。

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humbler than their northern counterpart in terms of bloodline and historical depth. It is this construction of an equally distinguished past through a common origin that set a firm foundation for a distinct and distinguished Viet identity deserving of independence and special treatment. In short, a common ancestry indicates a common “noble” rather than “ethnic” identity. It was a demonstration of equal footing in origin and in historical depth between Viet and its northern counterparts, and its very shared history with the North serves to distinguish Viet from the North (China).

My arguments for the Liao elite’s adoption of a Huangdi origin are similar. With regard to the aims of constructing a Huangdi origin, I argue that Liao ruling families focused on its great historical resources, the political prestige, and the potential augmentation of legitimacy offered by the Huangdi lineage. This historical depth would give them an equally distinguished and remote past as their contemporaries who ruled the previous Tang territories and beyond. As mentioned, it was a common practice to claim a sagely origin before, during, and after the tenth century. For the Liao ruling families, to have a common ancestor meant that the Liao’s history and past were not barbarian or humble, but just as noble as their neighbouring ruling clans. It meant a legitimate and prestigious historical foundation for the Liao state and ruling families, just as it meant to their neighbours.

Of course, those who claimed a distinguished origin were not always the ruling families of post-Tang regimes but also elite officials. However, it was always a necessity for post-Tang ruling families to pinpoint a noble ancestry. At very least, the issue of “origin” could not be

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allowed to become a reason to question their legitimacy as rulers. It was by first building a similarly long foundation, that the Liao ruling families could then build something different – with the eligibility to have an equally important, separate, and independent imperial power which in origin matched other states. In short, in the cases of Liao and Viet, a distinct identity and equally distinguished imperial position could be constructed through a prestigious origin common with others. In these contexts, a “common” origin led to *differentiation*, rather than assimilation or ethnic identification with another group.

## 6. Conclusion

Just as Sinitic was used by elites from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, to possess a sagely ancestry recorded in Sinitic materials transmitted from antiquity was a common practice in many Eastern Eurasian states. Depending on contextual factors, the reasons for adopting a remote ancestry labelled by modern historians as Han/Chinese differed. For those of Central Asian origin who had acquired elite status in the Tang Empire, their elite “Han” counterparts and the ruling clan of Tang both had the tradition of claiming a remote and noble origin. They faced a unified empire and a concrete and dominant “other” culture labelled as Han/*Huaxia*. Their change in ancestral memory thus normally had a goal. In this context, a distant ancestry was perceived as something exclusive to a cultural or ethnic “other.”

But in other cases the situation is more complicated. For the Viet regimes based in the Red River basin, although their monarchs maintained a vassal-superior relationship with most of

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their northern neighbours, these Sinic neighbours were someone they fought with, against which they maintained a distinct identity. In this context, a distant ancestry borrowed from north had almost no ethnic implication, and not been othered as something exclusive to the Han or Chinese - their longstanding enemy. The Yandi origin was understood by the Viet elite as a legacy common and open to all who wished to draw upon it. If the ancestral figure had begun to be understood in ethnic terms as Han/Chinese, then the claim to Yandi origin would have undermined the Viet's supposed distinct identity from Sinic empires. Again, to be cognate with an ethnic other does not always imply assimilation and identification with that ethnic other. No matter how many of these legacies were borrowed from "China" and no matter how influential what we call Han discourse was on Viet, the ancestry was regarded not as of one ethnic/cultural entity but common to all, on the basis of which a *distinct* identity could then be selected and constructed.

For the Liao, besides the above similarities with Viet, its situation was more complex. As mentioned above, elements which we now unquestioningly view as "Han/Chinese" were at the time shared by a dozen of regimes. It was a world consisting of many regimes of various origins, within former Tang districts and those beyond, including but not limited to Japan, Korean, Bohai, Uighur states, and the Dali 大理 Kingdom (937-1094; 1096-1253). In contrast to the interstate context for the Viet elite whose major threat was the unified and powerful northern empires, what the many contemporary states of Liao shared, such as a common ancestry or Sinitic written system, were not something of one unified and concrete Han/Chinese other. In the Liao historical context, to borrow these Sinic elements were not

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ethnic choices.

As discussed, if we assume that a Huangdi origin was equated with Han identity, then we cannot explain why the Liao ruling families sought an origin from their conquered subjects. Many Han elite of Liao did indeed have ancestries traceable back to antiquity, as many others did centuries ago. But being cognate with the subject Han elite was only possible if the ancestry was universally considered by the Liao native elite clans a common legacy shared by elite strata of the surrounding world rather than something exclusively of the subject group.

The Liao adoption of a common ancestor indicates the existence of a trans-border elite stratum and community on the Eastern Eurasian continent. To construct a cognate past with the ruling families of other regimes shows the Liao elite's identification in a hierarchical sense with this greater ruling elite community rather than with an ill-defined ethnic group. It was through constructing something in common with the elite others in the past that the Liao ruling families achieved distinct identities in their contemporary world with their counterparts. The distinction was achieved not by having a different ancestor, but precisely by having a shared one. It was through this common ancestry, that Liao ruling clans could place themselves in a common cultural context with the others. There is no doubt that Liao came to be in a world largely defined by what we now call "Chinese" elements – the Sinitic written language, remote ancestry in antiquity, and Tang institutions. But the ethnic/cultural label for these elements was clearly not one imposed by the Liao elite but by later historians. As things shared by many of Liao's contemporaries of various backgrounds, these elements shaped

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Liao discourses and their perspective towards the world in which they were active, but in the meantime the trans-border shareability of these elements meant that no one could monopolise any of them.

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## Chapter IV “Under the Pole Star is the Central Kingdom”:

### Interpreting the Spatial Identities of the Liao Dynasty

Through examining Sinitic materials from the Liao period, this chapter discusses the ways by which the Liao elite constructed Liao spatial identities. By spatial identity, I refer to the constructions of Liao as either a “northern” or “central” state within Liao cosmological frameworks. Although there have been studies of Liao identities, the spatial and cosmological aspects have not yet undergone careful investigation, and studies on this topic are outnumbered by those about regimes based in China proper.<sup>1</sup> This lack of investigation is to a large extent a result of the paucity of primary materials, but also partly because scholars have framed Liao identities through the discourse of sinicisation outlined in Chapter I. This approach treats Liao as either the “northern” component of a greater China or a legitimate China itself, and over-simplifies the issue by reducing the constructions of Liao identities as either a “northern” state or a “Central Kingdom” to issues of how the regime had culturally or mentally become “Chinese.”<sup>2</sup> This body of literature overlooks the ways by which the Liao

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance, Hu Axiang 胡阿祥, *Wei zai siming: “Zhongguo” gujin chengwei yanjiu* 伟哉斯名——『中国』古今称谓研究 [A Great Name: Studies of the Appellations of “China” from Ancient times to present] (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000); Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Zhaizi Zhongguo: Chongjian youguan “Zhongguo” de lishi lunshu* 宅兹中国：重建有关「中国」的历史论述 [Residing in the Central Kingdom: Reconstructing the Historical Interpretations of “China”] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011); Peter K. Bol, “Geography and Culture: The Middle-Period Discourse on the Zhong guo – The Central Country,” in Huang Ying-kuei (ed.), *Space and Cultural Fields: Spatial Images, Practices and Social Production* (Taipei: Center for Chinese Studies, 2009), pp. 61-106.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance, Zhao Yongchun 赵永春 and Li Yujun 李玉君, “Liaoren zicheng ‘Zhongguo’ kaolun” 辽人自称中国考论 [On the Liao Self-references as the Central Kingdom], *Shehui kexue jikan* 社会科学辑刊 (2010:5), pp. 143-49; Zhao Yongchun, “Liaoren zicheng ‘Beichao’ kaolun” 辽人自称“北朝”考论

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elite constructed Liao spatial identities on their own terms, and how their interpretations of Liao spatial identities differed from the preexisting discourses which appear in Sinitic historiography, and thus underestimates the agency of the Liao elite in adding new understandings to the classical scholarship.

Scholars who follow counter-narratives to sinicisation have also neglected to look at the Liao identity from spatial/cosmological perspectives. Their focus has mostly been on why the Kitan or Liao were culturally and mentally not “Chinese” – the conscious practice and preservation of native Kitan customs and values, the practical and selective adoption and modifications of “Chinese” cultural elements, and the boundaries consciously drawn between what was native and what was *Zhongguo* (China).<sup>3</sup> The classics, canonised by Confucians, have normally been ethnicised as Han/Chinese, and the great impact of the discourse of the classics on Liao constructions of identity and the ways the Liao elite *reinterpreted* the classical scholarship on their own behalf have received little attention.

This chapter thus focuses on aspects that concern the Liao elite rather than framing the Liao identity issues within an ethnic binary as historians are usually inclined to do. As discussed in the previous two chapters, I argue while the Liao elite maintained a binary between Han and Kitan, what composed a Han or Kitan was different from our present understanding based on an ethnic discourse. The Liao elite had drawn upon a large body of scholarship and discourse

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[On the Liao Self-references as the Northern Dynasty], *Shixue jikan* 史学集刊 (2008:5), pp. 19-27.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance, the scholarship of the “conquest dynasties” and the recent studies on Qing outlined in Chapter I.



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from the Sinitic classics and Sinic traditions to construct Liao spatial identities. However, the scholarship and discourse were modified and reinterpreted for local purposes, appropriated as universal and shareable legacies inherited from antiquity rather than something exclusive to the Han. Drawing on these common legacies did not lead the Liao elite to identify themselves using a Han/Chinese identity.

Scholars have in fact pointed out that the Liao elite perceived Liao as a “northern” regime in their idea of the structure of cosmos.<sup>4</sup> However, several aspects related to this northern identity are misleading and require more attention. For instance, scholars have discussed or reflected briefly on the representative cosmic elements of Liao chosen by the Liao elite, such as the cosmic agent of Water and the colour of Black. However, misled by Sinitic materials and their discourse, some historians have consistently mistaken Water as chosen according to the framework of dynastic succession – a model that featured in several dynasties’ legitimacy discourse prior to and following the Liao dynasty.<sup>5</sup> But this chapter will contend that the agent of Water was framed within a cosmic model concerning the structure of the world and was a “spatial” issue, not one defined by time or history, and thus dynastic transition. Besides, the relationships between colours and cardinal directions in the Liao context have simply been assumed without careful investigation, for example the correspondence between Black

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<sup>4</sup> Zhao, “Liaoren zicheng ‘Beichao’ kaolun”; Tao, *Song Liao guanxi shi yanjiu*, pp. 29-30; Mori, “Sen’en no mei no rekishiteki haikai,” pp. 86-89.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance, Liu, “Deyun zhi zheng,” pp. 189-92; Yuan Chen, “Legitimation Discourse and the Theory of the Five Elements in Imperial China,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 44 (2014), pp. 325-64, pp. 342-46.

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




and the Liao as a northern regime.<sup>6</sup> This chapter will therefore discuss the connections between the Liao representative colour and tenth- and eleventh-century interstate relationships, placing the issue in its actual post-Tang multistate context.

Another issue that has received less attention is the “central” identity of Liao within the cosmic structure conceived by the Liao elite. One study by Yang Xiaochun, and another by Zhang Qifan and Xiong Mingqin, have discussed the usage of the term *Zhongguo* (Central Kingdom) in the Liao dynasty. They consider that the term *Zhongguo*, which was discovered to have been inscribed by the Liao Daozong 道宗 Emperor (r. 1055-1101) on the back of a Buddhist statue, denotes the home of Buddhism – India.<sup>7</sup> Ji Shi argues that the *Zhongguo* that Daozong Emperor means here is the Liao state itself, and by examining the Kitan small script he argues that “Kitan State” in the Kitan language means the Great Central Kingdom.<sup>8</sup> I agree with Ji Shi that the Sinitic *Zhongguo* denotes Liao rather than India, but it is a pity that he does not provide any reasoning behind this hypothesis.

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<sup>6</sup> O. Pritsak, “Qara. Studien zur turkischen Rechtssymbolik,” in *Zeki Validi Togan’a Armagan* (Istanbul, 1955) cited in Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*, p. 217, note 72; Chen, “Legitimation Discourse,” p. 346, note 71.

<sup>7</sup> Yang Xiaochun 杨晓春, “‘Zhongguo’ he ‘Yindu’ ” “中国” 和 “印度” [“China” and “India”], *Xueshu yanjiu* 学术研究 (2005:5), pp. 144-45, p. 144; Zhang Qifan 张其凡 and Xiong Mingqin 熊鸣琴, “Liao Daozong ‘Yuan houshi sheng Zhongguo’ zhushuo kaobian” 辽道宗 “愿后世生中国” 诸说考辨 [On the Various Interpretations of Liao Daozong’s Words of “Hope My Scions to be Born in the Central Kingdom”], *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 (2010:5), pp. 84-93.

<sup>8</sup> Ji Shi 即实, “ bu dengyu : yu Liu Fengzhu tongzhi shangque”  不等于 ——与刘凤翥同志商榷 [ Is not Equivalent to : An Argument with Liu Fengzhu], *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究 (1986: 1), pp. 23-28, p. 24.

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Mori Eisuke has investigated the correspondence between states and cardinal directions perceived by Liao, Song, Xi Xia and Koryŏ elites in interstate interactions, and pointed out that the Liao court/elite had assigned these states each with a cardinal direction (in most cases, north, south, west and east respectively). By examining a piece of diplomatic information recorded in a state letter sent from Liao to Koryŏ in 1035, Mori suggests that by employing the Pole Star (*beiji* 北極) to refer to Liao, the Liao court emphasised its identity as both a northern and central state.<sup>9</sup> Although I agree with this general conclusion,<sup>10</sup> Mori does not provide further discussion of the point, yet several key issues must be clarified. For instance, how could a northern state be a central state at the same time within Liao discourse and what was the connection between the two? Why and in what ways were the north, centre, Liao, and the Pole Star connected with one another? Was it simply diplomatic rhetoric derived from Sinic tradition similar to that employed by Liao's neighbours, or was this a newly invented Liao discourse which aimed to relocate the cosmic centre from northern China to Liao?

As demonstrated by Sinitic sources, I argue that the Liao elite gradually developed Liao-centric ideas which conceived of Liao as a new centre of the universe distinct from the “old” one centred on the northern China plain. In Liao cosmology, this central identity was constructed through scholarship of the classics, which had been mostly canonised by followers of Confucianism. As we shall discuss, an important model was that the Liao elite treated Liao as the projection of the centre of heaven – the Pole Star – on the earth, which in Liao cosmology justified the Liao imperial court as the universal centre.

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<sup>9</sup> Mori, “Jūichi seiki kōhan ni okeru HokuSō no kokusaiteki chii ni tsuite,” pp. 289-90.

<sup>10</sup> I have independently reached a similar conclusion.

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However, the Sinitic materials and their discourses concerning cosmic structure were the major sources with which the Liao elite could shape their own ideas about the Liao place within the post-Tang multistate world. In Sinic classical discourse, the realm where Liao was located was interpreted as in the “north” of the “old centre” (the northern China plain). Thus constructions of Liao as a new centre, as we shall see, cannot simply override the impact of Sinic discourse, and would therefore sometimes present apparently conflicting interpretations. For instance, the Liao centrality, indicated by the Pole Star, was constructed through the Liao elite’s acceptance of Liao as a “northern” regime in the first place. Besides, although sometimes the Liao elite emphasised the central position of Liao in the universe, the representative elements for Liao were always those with designated correspondence to the cardinal direction of “north,” such as the colour of Black and the agent of Water. This apparently ambiguous or paradoxical relationship between the northern and central identities of Liao could nevertheless provide the Liao elite with the flexibility to express their place in the cosmos. As will be discussed below, depending on different contexts or different audiences, the Liao elite either emphasised Liao as the cosmic centre or underscored the northern character of Liao. On occasion, both its central and northern identities were highlighted. Therefore, the expressed identity or identities of Liao were situational and must be contextualised.

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## 1. Liao as a northern dynasty

In Eastern Eurasian history, it was common practice for the political elites of various imperial courts to employ different types of cosmic elements to represent their identities. These elements were important and integral parts of dynastic legitimacy, which symbolised the specific cosmic patrons of the dynasty demonstrable to both domestic and foreign audiences. For instance, the Song dynasty considered its representative colour to be Red and its cosmic agent Fire. As appears in Sinitic sources, Song emperors regarded themselves as descendants of the Red Spirit Lord, who in Sinic tradition was a guardian deity of the cardinal direction of south.<sup>11</sup> The Liao elite had conducted similar practices, and designated the colour of Black and the cosmic agent of Water as representative elements of Liao. However, the issues concerning the Liao representative colour are yet to receive a careful examination, and several key aspects have been largely misunderstood.

### Colours and cardinal directions in the Liao context

As some scholars have pointed out, the colour of black played an important role in the cultures of some nomadic groups which originated from Eastern Eurasian steppe region, including the Kitan.<sup>12</sup> As we shall see, there are hints of the Liao preference of black over

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<sup>11</sup> On the cosmic patron of Song, see Liu Fusheng 刘复生, “Songchao ‘huoyun’ lunlüe: jiantan ‘wude zhuan’ zhengzhi xueshuo de zhongjie” 宋朝“火运”论略—兼谈“五德转移”政治学说的终结 [On the “Fire Fortune” of the Song Dynasty: With Reflections on the End of the Political Discourse of “the Rotation of the Five Agents”], *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 (1997:3), pp. 92-106.

<sup>12</sup> Chen Shu 陈述, “Hala Qidan shuo: Jianlun Tuoba gaixing he Yuandai Qingdai de guohao” 哈喇契丹說—兼論拓跋改姓和元代清代的國号 [On the Kara Kitan: With Reflections on the Tuoba’s Change of

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other colours in Sinitic materials, expressed through the discourse and cosmic frameworks of Sinic origin. Scholars have discussed the birth myths of the second emperor Deguang recorded in the *LS*. The history relates a story about Empress Yingtian's dream of a "black hare" which leapt into her bosom. The empress thereupon became pregnant with Deguang, and during the birth, clouds covered their "black tent."<sup>13</sup> As will be discussed, since there was an association between the colour of Black and the cosmic agent of Water in Sinic tradition, scholars have tended to consider the above records as showing the symbolic importance of both the colour of Black and the agent of Water in signifying the heaven-granted imperial legitimacy of Liao.<sup>14</sup> Although the *LS* was compiled in the fourteenth century, a large proportion of information in its annals was sourced from the *Liao Veritable Records*.<sup>15</sup> The above passages may have reflected a Liao discourse of imperial legitimacy which was associated with the colour of black.

I agree with the general idea that the Liao elite had assigned the colour of black to Liao, but existing scholarship on this issue is sometimes misleading. Several key issues should be clarified. There have been observations that in Sinitic and Turkic materials, Liao is referred to as Qara Kitan. Since Qara is a loanword from Turkic language which means black, scholars have assumed that Qara Kitan meant Black Kitan.<sup>16</sup> However, they normally overlook the

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Their Surname and on the Dynastic Names of Yuan and Qing], *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 (1956:2), pp. 67-77.

<sup>13</sup> See the discussion by Chen, "Legitimation Discourse," p. 345.

<sup>14</sup> Chen, "Legitimation Discourse," p. 346.

<sup>15</sup> See discussions in Feng, *Liao shi yuanliu kao*.

<sup>16</sup> Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China: 900–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 206. Also see Chen, "Hala Qidan shuo," p. 67, note 1.

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fact that Qara Kitan was a name employed by outsiders rather than one of Liao self-reference.<sup>17</sup> Although I suggest that this “black” identity perceived by outsiders might have resulted from a Liao self-designated representative colour demonstrable to their foreign audiences, the name Qara Kitan itself cannot be taken straightforwardly as firm evidence showing the Liao self-chosen representative colour.

In addition, although scholars have discussed colours as symbols of political legitimacy consistently taken by Eastern Eurasian dynasties (including Liao) for various kinds of domestic consumption,<sup>18</sup> they were also *geographically/spatially* applicable to interstate relationships as well. Existing scholarship has often neglected this aspect. I argue that when discussed as cosmic elements and applied to interstate interaction, colours were relational concepts in a similar way to cardinal directions, their very existence depending on and justifying one another. As we shall see, in line with pre-Liao Sinic tradition, at least in the Liao discourse carried by Sinitic sources, colours were associated with the cardinal directions. Although scholars have pointed this out, they have either *assumed* so based on pre-Liao practices without a discussion of evidence from the Liao period, or treated the issue as a

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<sup>17</sup> See the discussion by Aisin Gioro Ulhicun 愛新覺羅 烏拉熙春, “Liaochao guohao fei HalaQidan (Liao Qidan) kao: jianni Qidan dazi 契 丹 ji Qidan xiaozi 契 丹 de yinzhi” 遼朝國號非「哈喇契丹(遼契丹)」考: 兼擬契丹大字 契 及契丹小字 契 的音值 [The State Name of the Liao Dynasty Was not “Qara Khitai (Liao Khitai)”: With Presumptions of Phonetic Values of Khitai Large Script 契 and Khitai Small Script 契] in Aisin Gioro, *Aishin Gyoro Uru Hishun Joshin Kittan Kenkyū*, pp. 191-201.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance, Liu, “Deyun zhi zheng”; Hok-lam Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China: Discussions under the Jurchen-Chin Dynasty* (1115–1234) (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1984).

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purely northern “nomadic” phenomenon without discussing the Sinic cultural impact.<sup>19</sup>

And similarly to the perception of directions, in the Liao context the employment of colour was a reflection of the Liao understanding of the contemporary multistate system and interstate relationships. Different colours were assigned to different states located in different cardinal directions, justified by and justifying other colours representing the Liao neighbours.

Correlation between Colour, Direction, and Agent

<b>Colour</b>	White	Blue	Black	Red	Yellow
<b>Direction</b>	West	East	North	South	Centre
<b>Agent</b>	Metal	Wood	Water	Fire	Earth

We have some evidence to show that Liao perceived neighbouring states to be represented by different colours. For instance, in 1044 an investiture edict sent to Koryŏ from the Liao court claimed that the civilisation of Liao had reached the land of Koryŏ: “[Our] civilisation has covered the Blue Corner, and our education has spread in the Blue Field.”<sup>20</sup> As we shall see in the following section, in Liao spatial and cosmological discourse the Koryŏ state was perceived to be located in the east. In this Liao imperial edict, the cardinal direction of east is not mentioned directly but represented by the colour of Blue following the rhetorical conventions established by the classics. Thus in this context both the Blue Corner (*cangyu* 蒼隅

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<sup>19</sup> See for instance, Chen Shu, “Hala Qidan shuo,” pp. 70-71; Yuan Chen, “Legitimation Discourse,” p. 346.

<sup>20</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 4:6.31. 化被蒼隅，聲敷青畎。



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隅) and Blue Field (*qingtian* 青畎) refer to Koryŏ.

Another example is found in a 1049 Liao edict brought by Liao envoys to the Koryŏ court, granting titles and ranks to the Koryŏ king. Written in the voice of Liao emperor Daozong, the beginning of the edict says, “I succeeded to the (Liao) throne in the imperial court. Our ancestors had achievements and our progenitors had virtues. The Blue Vassal established a country. The great became the suzerain and the small became the vassal... [Koryŏ] dominates the realm [where] the sun [rises], residing in the direction [where] the multiple mansions of Blue Dragon are located.”<sup>21</sup> Through the expression of “Blue Vassal” the Liao edict in fact calls Koryŏ an eastern subordinate state of Liao. Another metaphor for Koryŏ was the Blue Dragon, a mythical creature which in the Sinitic astrological context represented the seven mansions in the east. As we can observe, in Liao discourse, the Koryŏ state, the cardinal direction of east, the colour of Blue, and the symbol of Blue Dragon were associated with one another.

In 1057, another Liao emissary to Koryŏ carried a Liao imperial order which contained expressions similar to the above two. It contains a passage reading that “Koryŏ inaugurated the Blue Deity of Land, and orbited the imperial court. You have fulfilled the hegemonic career [of Liao], and met the responsibility of a vassal.”<sup>22</sup> The edict further complements the merits and traits of the Koryŏ monarchs, praising them as the “essence stored in the Mansions

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<sup>21</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 5:7.12. 青藩建社大者王而小者侯...控臨日域居蒼龍列宿之方...。

<sup>22</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 5:8.1-2. 其有踐開青社，遙控紫庭，紹匡合之霸圖，修委輸之臣節。

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of Dragon, and the talents from Jilin (Gyerim, Rooster Forest, where the ancestors of Koryŏ originated).”<sup>23</sup> The Deity of Land in Sinitic classics is *she* 社, which is normally a metaphor for a state. Again, both the Blue Deity of Land and the Mansions of Blue Dragon denote the Koryŏ state east of Liao. Although the specific Sinitic characters for the representative colour of Koryŏ vary (*qingfan* 青藩, *qingshe* 青社; *canglong liexiu* 蒼龍列宿, *longxiu* 龍宿), they convey the same message that the colour of Blue had been assigned by Liao to both the state of Koryŏ and the cardinal direction of east.

The above edicts illustrate two things. First, colours were applied in the discourse concerning interstate relationships and were not for domestic consumption only. Second, since colours were employed on diplomatic occasions as representative elements of a state and a cardinal direction, then in this context the colours must have possessed a relational concept similar to the cardinal directions. Just as each direction exists because of the very existence of the others, so do the colours. Although as discussed Liao history suffers a dearth of native sources, we can still infer that other colours corresponded to other cardinal directions in the Liao discourse. And the associations between the cardinal direction of east, the Koryŏ state and the colour Blue further indicate that the Liao elite must have assigned Liao with a colour as well.

The indirect evidence of black tent and black hare from the post-Liao era tells us that when it came to dynastic legitimacy there was a preference towards the colour of black and this was

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<sup>23</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 5:8.2. 精儲龍宿，傑出雞林。

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also part of Kitan native culture. The tent, hare, and the Kitan as a steppe people seem to convey that the connection between the colour of black and the Liao state had nomadic origins. But was the colour black also associated with scholarship with Sinic origins during the course of the Liao dynasty? And although scholars suggest that black was connected with other Liao cosmic elements (such as the direction of north) in the Liao discourse, how was this connection expressed in Sinitic materials?

These issues at least can be answered in part by Liao contemporary materials. For instance, in a 1058 Liao tomb inscription for Xiao Min 蕭旻, a high ranking Liao official from the consort clan, the text claims that the Liao state “bears the essence of Kongtong and obtains the spirit of Black Lady (Xuannü 玄女),”<sup>24</sup> followed by a narrative of the great enterprises of previous Liao emperors. The Black Lady was a guardian deity of the cardinal direction of north, and in this context refers to the greatness of Liao, a state believed to be in possession of the favour of its cosmic patron. The term Kongtong will be discussed in a later section, but for now it will suffice to note that in Sinic tradition this was representative of the north as well, and was in the inscription associated with the Black Lady, thus serving the purpose of emphasising the Liao northern identity.

Another interesting example is found in a diplomatic document sent from Liao to Koryŏ. In 1047, a Liao imperial edict sent to Koryŏ relates to the reigning Koryŏ king that “[You are]

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<sup>24</sup> “Xiao Min muzhi” 蕭旻墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Xiao Min], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 113-14, p. 113. 稟空桐之秀氣，剖玄女之靈驗。

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invested/appointed by the northern [court] (*xuanshe* 玄社), and [we] rest upon [you] as our prime minister, and elevated [you] above the Three Masters. [Thus we] advance [you] to much higher positions with privilege, and lavishly grant you designations in order to reward your merits.”<sup>25</sup> As mentioned, when the colour is discussed in the paradigm of “Five Colours” it was a relational concept, and when discussed together with cardinal directions, which are also relational, each direction must have been assigned with a colour. In the edict the Liao court expresses that they value the Koryŏ king as their most faithful and predominant official, and single him out in the Liao court, which is represented by the *xuanshe*, Black Deity of Land. *Xuan* is an expression for black and represents the cardinal direction of north, and *xuanshe* which literally means Black Deity of Land denotes north or northern state. In this context, *xuanshe* is a metaphor for the Liao court and indicates that its identity associated with the north. As will be discussed later, in its communications with Koryŏ, a vassal state of Liao, Liao in fact always presents itself as a central state and emphasises its identity as the centre of the universe. But the point I want to make in this section is that, although in different contexts the Liao elite underscored different aspects of Liao identity (northern vs. central), the colour symbolising the Liao court was always that representing the cardinal direction of north.

Therefore, in the Liao dynasty the representative colour of Liao and its association with the cardinal direction were not just part of Kitan native culture, but were present in Sinitic materials and Sinic discourse. At least as observed from the Liao contemporary Sinitic

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<sup>25</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 5:7.8. 俾特建於玄社，倚為左相，峻陟三師，超躋馭貴之階，優賜褒功之號。

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materials, the colour of Black was one chosen cosmic representative element of the Liao court, connected with the Liao cosmic patrons that manifested the Liao spatial/cosmic-geographical identity as a northern state. And this representative element, as appears in Sinitic materials, was employed beyond domestic discourse and was applicable to interstate relationships. Both the colour and the cardinal direction in the Liao discourse were relational concepts. The colour of Black and the northern identity of Liao justified and were justified by the representative cosmic elements of Liao neighbouring states in the Liao discourse, such as the Koryŏ state. Although we lack direct evidence about how Liao designated colours of Song and Xi Xia, they must have also been assigned corresponding representative colours by the Liao elite.

### **The agent of Water**

It was also a common practice for Eastern Eurasian elites to associate regimes and cardinal directions with one of the five cosmic agents – Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth. For instance, in the official history of Eastern Han (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書) the *Memoir of the Yu, Fu, Gai and Zang* 虞傳蓋臧列傳 names the west as the Metal Direction and praised two officials' insistence on the protection of a prefecture on the Han dynasty's western border: "When Xianling [barbarians] disturbed our borders, Deng Zhi and Cui Lie [suggested] abandoning the Liang Prefecture. But Yu Xu and Fu Xie urged its protection. Therefore the Metal Direction was recovered."<sup>26</sup> In Northern Song imperial edicts sent to Tibetan tribal

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<sup>26</sup> Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 [Book of Later Han] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 7:58.1893. 先零擾疆，鄧、崔棄涼。詔、變令圖，再全金方。

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rulers, who during the eleventh century were their allies against Xi Xia, the Song court praised the Tibetan rulers for “bearing the vigorous spirit of the Metal Direction.”<sup>27</sup> In the context, the Metal Direction refers to Northern Song tribal allies and their leaders, located in a western direction to Northern Song. Of course, names to refer to the west can be various when employing the agent. For example, in a Tang poem dedicated to the famous Tang general Liu Hongji 劉宏基, whose style name was Kuigong 夔公, it uses the Metal Tiger to denote him: “Kuigong is extraordinary, [embedding] the essence of Metal Tiger.”<sup>28</sup> In Sinitic tradition the representative colour of the west was White and the agent was Metal, and the mythical White Tiger was the guardian of the western cardinal direction just as the Blue Dragon guarded the east. Liu Hongji had played an important defensive role during the Turkic invasion of the western borders of the Tang Empire, and was thus praised with the Metal Tiger – a combination of the representative elements of the west: the agent of Metal and the mythical creature of White Tiger.

As commonly known, the representative cosmic agent for the Liao dynasty was Water, but the issue of the agent – not merely for Liao, but in fact for all other dynasties – has always been discussed via the framework of a cyclical rotation of the Five Agents. The theory of Five Agents (Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth) was influential in interpreting political legitimacy across premodern Eastern Eurasia, especially between the Qin and Jin 金 periods.<sup>29</sup> The theory consists of two patterns of cyclical rotation of the five basic cosmic

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<sup>27</sup> *Song da zhaoling ji*, 239.936.

<sup>28</sup> Dong, *Quan Tang wen*, 7:629.6346. 夔公崢嶸，金虎之精。

<sup>29</sup> Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China*.

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elements. One was the cyclical conquest formula (*xiangke* 相克),<sup>30</sup> under which each agent is “conquered” by its successor in a sequence of Earth, Wood, Metal, Fire, and Water which in turn is conquered by Earth. It was Zou Yan 鄒衍 (ca. 305-240 BCE) of the Qi state of the Warring States period who first employed this pattern to explain the dynastic succession. In his discourse, the rise and fall of a dynasty was foreseen by the wax and wane of the power of each agent, and he assigned Earth, Wood, Metal, and Fire respectively to the four periods preceding and contemporary to himself – Huangdi, Yu [of the Xia dynasty], Tang [of the Shang dynasty], and the Zhou dynasty.<sup>31</sup> But Zou’s formula of interpreting the dynastic transition was then challenged in the Western Han period by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (192-104 BCE), who employed another pattern to explain the dynastic succession – the cyclical production formula (*xiangsheng* 相生). The new pattern followed a sequence of Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water which in turn generates Wood. This formula was preferred within elite discourse and replaced the cyclical conquest one.<sup>32</sup>

In Sinic tradition, each of the Five Agents had been assigned to other different natural or cosmic elements. For instance, with relevance to our discussion, they corresponded to the five cardinal directions, five colours and five virtues. Hok-lam Chan and Liu Pujiang have discussed the issue of Five Agents in the Liao dynasty, and their conclusions have been followed by other scholars.<sup>33</sup> While inspiring, the discussion about the Five Agents has also

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<sup>30</sup> Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China*, p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>32</sup> Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China*, p. 29.

<sup>33</sup> See for instance, Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China*; Liu, “Deyun zhi zheng,” pp. 191-92; Chen, “Legitimation Discourse,” pp. 342-45.

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been misleading. Scholars believe that the Liao elite framed the Liao representative agent via the model of dynastic succession as the many elites at various courts prior to Liao had done. The scholarship assumes that the Liao court chose the Water element in succession to the north China-based Later Jin dynasty represented by Metal, which was toppled by Liao in 947. For historians, this choice of Water was supposedly an indication that the Liao court had consciously placed itself into a “proper” Chinese dynastic lineage and thus as a symbol of Liao sinicisation.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the distinctive Liao understanding of how representative cosmic elements could be framed has been overlooked.

In fact, there is no direct evidence from the Liao period showing that the Liao court/elite ever adopted Water as its representative agent. The earliest reference comes from the Jin dynasty, recorded in the *Da Jin deyun tushuo*: “Liao employed Water as its representative virtue. Water produced Wood, and thus [our Jin] state should employ Wood in succession to the fortune of Liao.”<sup>35</sup> This opinion regarding the Jin agent was clearly based on the cyclical production formula of the theory of Five Agents. The passage does not specify by which means the Liao dynasty decided on their representative agent, but the way agent of Jin was discussed in the context suggests that the Jin elite considered that Liao did not employ ways to form their agent apart from the cyclical production formula.

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<sup>34</sup> Zhao, “Shilun Liaoren de Zhongguo guan,” p. 89; Chen, “Legitimation Discourse,” pp. 343-45; Liu, “Deyun zhi zheng,” pp. 189-92.

<sup>35</sup> *Da Jin deyun tushuo* 大金德運圖說 [Explanations of the Great Jin’s Power-cycle with Charts] in *Siku quanshu*, p. 3. 遼以水為德，水生木，國家宜承遼運為木德. For the translation of the title, with minor changes, see Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China*, p. 76.



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But I argue it is highly likely the Liao elite had chosen their Water element based on cardinal directions rather than the cyclical rotation schemes of Five Agents. For the Jin historians, the paucity of historical materials may already have affected writings on Liao history. The association between the cardinal direction of north and the Liao Water agent might already be unavailable to them. Even the extant evidence we have regarding Liao cosmic elements comes mostly from Koryŏ sources compiled in the thirteenth century and Liao tomb epitaphs excavated in recent decades. Conditioned by an ideological framework in which the cyclical theory of Five Agents was dominant in the choice of agent, and a shortage of Liao contemporary materials, the Jin officials might have known that Liao had employed Water as its cosmic element, but mistaken the agent as framed via the cyclical production formula just like it usually was.

Besides there being no direct evidence to say that Liao employed Water in accordance with the cyclical production formula, the following paragraphs will clarify several other points. First, the Liao elite must have chosen an agent for Liao, although as mentioned we have no direct contemporary references. Second, the agent was discussed in Liao with association to cardinal directions and colours. Third, at least based on extant materials and the Liao discourse of political legitimacy, I argue it is implausible for Liao to follow the cyclical production or conquest formulas of the Five Agents as suggested by post-Liao scholarship, including present-day scholarship. Liao did not, as is normally believed, choose Water according to the framework of lineal dynastic transition in succession to Later Jin's Metal agent. Rather, the Water was framed through a spatial/geographical model, and discussed in

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the context of an interstate system.

I have already outlined that the Liao elite chose Black as its representative colour and in Sinitic materials the colour was associated with the cardinal direction of north. Based on the established correspondence between colours, cardinal directions, and agents in Sinic tradition, we can in fact infer that if Liao had chosen an agent, then it would have been Water. But before reaching this tentative conclusion, we need to firstly examine whether the Liao elite really did designate an agent for Liao, and if so, based on which framework it was designated (the lineal dynastic/cyclical formula or a spatial/geographical model).

Our evidence primarily comes from Liao-Koryŏ diplomatic documents. Similarly to the colours and cardinal directions, in Liao discourse the Liao elite had assigned a specific agent to Koryŏ. For instance, a 1055 imperial edict from Liao to grant ranks to the reigning Koryŏ king praises him by saying “The virtue of Wood is in charge of Benevolence.”<sup>36</sup> The agent of Wood in Sinitic classics was a representative element of the east, and in the edict it is clearly employed to denote the monarch of Koryŏ. In the meantime, Wood also corresponded with Benevolence, one of the five most valued virtues in the Confucian discourse. The Liao edict thus correlates the Koryŏ ruler/state, the agent of Wood, and the virtue of Benevolence.

Another example can be found in a 1084 funeral oration sent to Koryŏ from Liao to mourn for the deceased Koryŏ king. The text, written in the voice of the Liao emperor to the new

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<sup>36</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 5:7.31. 木德司仁。

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Koryŏ monarch, reads that “[Your] kingship is noble, and [you have] inherited the enfeoffment of the Blue Realm in your early age. The [virtue of] the deity of Wood is Benevolence, bearing the essence of the east.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly, the text praises the kingship of Koryŏ via allusions to representative elements of the Koryŏ state usually employed by Liao: the cardinal direction of east, the colour of Blue (the Blue Realm, *qingshe*), the agent of Wood, and the virtue of Benevolence.

In a 1094 Liao diplomatic document sent to the heir of Koryŏ king, we find in it similar expressions: “In order to pacify my vassal states, I examined the classics. The Blue Realm is a noble enfeoffment, and is like an iron fence for [our] imperial house... Heir of Koryŏ King, Wang Yu, blessings you have received are abundant and your pedigree is orthodox; your talent is magnificent and your personal traits are outstanding. The Dragon Star carries the essence of the seven mansions, representing great wisdom; the deity of Wood has its outstanding position among the Five Agents, born to be ample in Benevolence... Since Liezu (the temple name for the first Koryŏ ruler), [your state] has been a vassal to our dynasty. The covenants [between us] are as magnificent as the Tai Mountain.”<sup>38</sup> This 1094 diplomatic letter contains almost all the aforementioned representative elements which Liao had assigned to Koryŏ. The Dragon refers to the Blue Dragon, one of the four symbols representing the east, and in this context the Dragon Star denoted the seven mansions in the east and was a metaphor for Koryŏ. Alongside it we find associations of Koryŏ with the colour of Blue, the

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<sup>37</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 6:10.2. 王爵馭貴，早襲青社之封；木神則仁，全賦東方之氣。

<sup>38</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 6:10.34. 朕若稽古典，誕撫庶邦，眷青社之名封，迺皇家之鉅屏...高麗國王嗣子王昱，慶隆世嫡，才茂人英。龍星騰七宿之精，夙鍾其智；木神冠五行之秀，生富於仁。

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virtue of Benevolence, and the agent of Wood.

The above discussion has revealed two major points. First, the cosmic elements of agent and virtue, just like the colour of Blue, the cardinal direction of east, and the heavenly body of Dragon mansions, were applicable to an interstate context and assigned to a foreign state by the Liao elite. Since they were used as relational concepts, within the Liao cosmology the Liao dynasty must have also been assigned with an agent by its elite. Besides, from the above examples of Koryŏ we know each of these cosmic elements was associated with one another in the Liao discourse. Then given the fact that Liao was represented by the colour of Black, it follows that the agent of Liao was Water.

Second and more importantly, the agent representing the Liao was employed in a spatial/geographical and cosmological framework, rather than a model of lineal dynastic succession. It does not mean the two frameworks are in conflict, but in the following discussion, I argue that at least based on extant materials it is implausible that the Liao elite employed the Water agent within the framework of cyclical production of the Five Agents, and in a mode of lineal dynastic transition.

According to the Song materials, the Later Jin regime employed Metal as its representative agent.<sup>39</sup> Without providing any evidence, post-Liao scholars, especially those of the Yuan dynasty, had usually assumed that the Liao elite had designated Water for their dynasty in

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<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, *CFYG*, 1:1.2; 1:4.44.

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succession to Later Jin's Metal. In 947 the Liao armies conquered Later Jin and occupied northern China for around three months. Then the Liao forces returned north due to various factors including the local resistance. In a world dominated by the cyclical rotation schemes of the Five Agents, Later Jin's choice of Metal and the Liao choice of Water, as well as the 947 Liao conquest of Later Jin, naturally led Yuan historians to consider Liao's Water a decision made based on its claim to be successor to the legitimacy of Later Jin.

However, in my view the Liao choice of Water and the Liao conquest of Later Jin are merely coincidental events. First, there is no evidence to show that the Liao choice of Water was made in succession to Later Jin. As mentioned above, the *Da Jin deyun tushuo* merely mentions that "Liao employed Water as its representative virtue" without mentioning based on which kind of framework the agent was chosen, and there is likewise no mention of Liao succession to Later Jin. Nevertheless, the work clearly considers Jin's own agent to be in succession to that of Liao and framed the issue of agent through the formula of cyclical production: "Thus [our Jin] state should employ Wood in succession to the fortune of Liao."<sup>40</sup>

This approach of framing the Jin agent was likely a major reason why later historians assumed that the Liao elite had chosen theirs in a manner similar to Jin. But had the Liao elite really constructed their own dynasty as Later Jin's successor? According to extant materials, Yuan historians had in their works treated Liao as a regime succeeding the dynastic legitimacy of Later Jin. For instance, Yuan scholar Xiu Duan 修端 in his article "Bian Liao

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<sup>40</sup> *Da Jin deyun tushuo*, p. 3. 國家宜承遼運為木德。

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Song Jin zhengtong” asserted that: “Since the late Tang period, Liao had possessed the North, and [its imperial enterprise] was not gained from usurpation. It then succeeded to the legitimacy of Later Jin.”<sup>41</sup> It is based on this passage that Liu Pujiang argues that Liao chose Water in succession to Later Jin’s Metal.<sup>42</sup> But in fact the article does not tell us about the Liao agent and the ways in which Liao decided its agent. The Liao succession to Later Jin’s legitimacy is here Xiu Duan’s own argument, aiming to express the idea that Liao should have its place in the legitimate dynastic succession and thereby be taken as a legitimate predecessor of Yuan. Another Yuan historian, Yang Weizhen 楊維禎 is cited in *Nancun chuogeng lu* as stating that “During the period [of Yuan], those who discussed [the issue of legitimacy] thought that Liao had succeeded the legitimacy of Later Jin.”<sup>43</sup> This piece of information has also been taken by Liu as evidence that Liao regarded itself as the successor of Later Jin.<sup>44</sup> But this again is simply a statement by a Yuan historian on how writers at his time concluded about the issue of legitimacy, rather than decisions by the Liao elite in the tenth century. Materials as such mirror Yuan historians’ discourse on the issue of legitimacy instead of those of the Liao elite. Information like this clearly cannot be taken as evidence of the Liao discourse on dynastic succession and the means by which which the Water element was chosen.

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<sup>41</sup> Xiu Duan 修端, “Bian Liao Song Jin zhengtong” 辯遼宋金正統 [On the Legitimacy of Liao, Song, and Jin] in Su Tianjue 蘇天爵 (ed.), *Yuan wenlei* 元文類 [Collection of Yuan Literary Works] (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1989), p. 496. 遼自唐末保有北方，又非篡奪，復承晉統。

<sup>42</sup> Liu, “Deyun zhi zheng,” p. 191.

<sup>43</sup> Yang Weizhen 楊維禎, “Zhengtong bian” 正統辨 [On the Dynastic Legitimacy], in Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 *Nancun Chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕錄 [Records of the Spare Farming Season at the South Suburb] (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), 3.34. 議者以遼承晉統。

<sup>44</sup> Liu, “Deyun zhi zheng,” pp. 191-92.

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In addition, historically speaking, the cyclical production formula was normally employed based on the premise of accepting the former regime as the source of legitimacy of the new state. The wax and wane of the power of an agent indicated the transmission of the Mandate of Heaven. Thus, to suggest the Water agent of Liao was designated to succeed the Metal of Later Jin is to assume that Liao recognised Later Jin as its legitimate predecessor and source of legitimacy, and that the Mandate of Heaven of Liao was taken from Later Jin. However, this is not the case. As Liu Pujiang argues, in the eleventh century the Liao had begun to contend with Northern Song to be the state representing a legitimate “China.” His argument is based on evidence which shows increasing Liao attention to the Imperial Seal, which was believed to have been transmitted from the first emperor of Qin – Ying Zheng.<sup>45</sup> According to our sources, Liao acquired the Imperial Seal from Later Jin in 947 after the four-year war, and as Liu shows in his article, in the eleventh century the Liao court emphasised its value in order to buttress Liao dynastic legitimacy.

Liu therefore contends that the emphasis placed by Liao on the Imperial Seal acquired from Later Jin indicates that the Liao court based the source of its legitimacy on its succession to Later Jin.<sup>46</sup> While I do agree with Liu that Liao indeed utilised the Imperial Seal to support its claims to dynastic legitimacy, I argue that this had nothing to do with the legitimacy of Later Jin. The possession of the Imperial Seal would of course add weight to one’s

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<sup>45</sup> Liu, “Deyun zhi zheng,” pp. 191-92.

<sup>46</sup> Liu, “Deyun zhi zheng,” pp. 191-92.

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legitimacy,<sup>47</sup> but it was not always tied up with the framework for legitimate dynastic succession. For instance, the Han dynasty obtained the Imperial Seal from Qin but the Han elite dismissed Qin as its legitimate predecessor, and criticised the tyranny of Qin policies. They adopted the cyclical production formula in replacement of the cyclical conquest adopted by Qin, and circumvented Qin to succeed the Zhou dynasty. In the following centuries, regimes continued to value the Imperial Seal but few recognised Qin legitimacy in history. Thus, although the conquest of Later Jin clearly helped to enhance the legitimacy of Liao since the event demonstrated the might of Liao military power, it does not follow that the Liao court's emphasis on the Imperial Seal was equivalent to and can simply be taken as the evidence of Liao's recognition of Later Jin as its legitimate predecessor.

More importantly, in history Later Jin was in fact never a legitimate political ancestor of Liao, but rather its subordinate state. In 936, Shi Jingtang, at that time a Later Tang military governor, requested Liao emperor Deguang's assistance in avoiding punishment by Later Tang. Later that year Deguang invested Shi Jingtang as a vassal emperor and concluded a fictive kinship with him, becoming Shi Jingtang's fictive father. Deguang also formalised Later Jin as a son/vassal regime of Liao. When the second Later Jin emperor refused to recognise the Liao-Later Jin fictive kinship which indicated their position in the interstate political hierarchy, the Liao launched a four-year punitive war (943-947) and destroyed the state. Clearly, Liao and Later Jin were unequal states, and the legitimacy of Liao could never

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<sup>47</sup> On the importance of the Qin Imperial Seal in justifying dynastic legitimacy, see for instance, Xiao Gaohong 萧高洪, "Chuanguo xi yu junquan shenshou de guannian" 传国玺与君权神授的观念 [The Imperial Seal and the Divine Rulership], *Jiangxi shehui kexue* 江西社会科学 (1989:2), pp. 120-25.



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entirely rely upon or come from a vassal state. On the contrary, the source of legitimacy of Later Jin came from Liao. And in fact the Liao regime was established in 907, much earlier than Later Jin. The political legitimacy and Mandate of Heaven of Liao, as will be discussed later, were interpreted in the Liao sources as rooted in the reign of Abaoji – the founding emperor of the Liao dynasty. Therefore, although Liao eventually conquered Later Jin in 947 which of course did bolster Liao political legitimacy, it would be implausible for the Liao elite to treat their vassal and fictive son state as a legitimate predecessor, and to designate the Water agent in succession to that vassal.

The above discussion has analysed the representative elements of Liao, and shown that these elements were associated with the northern direction in Sinic discourse. They mirrored a self-perceived “northern” identity by the Liao elite. However, “north” is clearly not the full story of Liao identity in Liao cosmology. As mentioned, the cardinal direction was a relational concept and as a regime in a multistate world, the Liao self-perceived spatial identity was multifaceted and cannot be explained by a single narrative and it is vital to contextualise what kind of cosmic/spatial identity has been employed. Thus although the colour of Black and the agent of Water were the chosen representative elements of Liao and in Sinic discourse they were indeed associated with the north, whether the Liao court would highlight its northern identity really depends on the audience.

One example was the Liao contemporary, the Song dynasty. As mentioned above, in diplomatic contact with Liao, Song appears and was perceived by Liao as a Southern Dynasty.

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But in domestic discourse and the diplomatic correspondence with Song vassal states, the Song court presents itself as the only Central Kingdom, which was common practice for regimes based in northern China. In addition, in history these Central Kingdoms chose their representative colours in accordance with the theory of the Five Agents and designated the colour according to a lineal dynastic transition. That means the chosen representative elements were normally irrelevant to their preferred spatial/geographical identity as a Central Kingdom. For instance, Tang, the Five Dynasties and Song each had a different colour, clearly not based on their perceived spatial/cosmological location as the centre of the universe – which could only be represented by the colour of Yellow. As briefly mentioned, the Song dynasty had selected Red as its representative colour and Fire as its cosmic patron. Although in Sinic cosmology and philosophy these represented the cardinal direction of south, the Song choices sprung from an ideological arena irrelevant to its self-perceived central position in the universe which was derived from a different corpus of classical scholarship. And although the agent of Fire was a symbol for the cardinal direction of south, “south” when framed by the Five Agents theory was also irrelevant to the Song image of a Southern Dynasty when communicating with the Liao state on diplomatic occasions because the latter was rooted in contemporary interstate relationships and had nothing to do with the Song representative colour of Red or agent of Fire. To return to the case of Liao, the approaches by which the Liao elite framed Liao representative cosmic elements, as discussed, were different from the cyclical schemes of Five Agents adopted by Liao’s southern neighbours. While its chosen cosmic elements were those representing the north, the Liao court did *not* always see itself as a northern regime but in many cases treated Liao as a Central State.

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And in turn, not all “northern” dynasties chose Black and Water even though they saw themselves and were perceived to be in the cardinal direction of north. For instance, the Jin court, which was located to the north of Southern Song was preoccupied with its central place in the universe and struggled to select between the colours of Yellow and White, and between the agents of Metal and Earth. The Mongol Yuan state, which always appeared as a northern regime, displayed much less interest in choosing a representative colour and agent,<sup>48</sup> and although recently Yuan Chen has argued that the Yuan court chose White in succession to Jin’s Yellow,<sup>49</sup> this too is not the colour of Black for the north. Therefore, in different contexts the choices of representative cosmic elements could vary, and as we shall see later, the spatial identities of Liao should be understood in a similar manner. Over the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Liao elite in fact had also developed several ways to construct the central identity of Liao.

### **Martial traits and the Liao northern identity**

Another element used to represent the Liao state which receives less attention was the “martial quality.” In general, military merits played an important role than literacy for many so-called non-Han ruling elites of Liao, Jin, Yuan and Qing. Many of the aforementioned

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<sup>48</sup> Liu Pujiang, “‘Wude zhongshi’ shuo zhi zhongjie: Jianlun Songdai yijiang chuantong zhengzhi wenhua de shanbian” “五德终始” 说之终结—兼论宋代以降传统政治文化的嬗变 [The Ending of the “Rotation of the Five Agents”: With Reflections on the Changes of Political Cultures Since the Song Dynasty], *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中国社会科学 (2006:2), pp. 177-90, pp. 187-88.

<sup>49</sup> Chen, “Legitimation Discourse,” pp. 348-56.

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Liao tomb inscriptions do underscore Liao's military might and superiority over its neighbours.<sup>50</sup> We have little information about the classical terminology used to express the relationship between martial characteristics and Liao, but one extant inscription does show that such a connection was established between the two by the Liao elite.

In a tomb inscription written for Yel ü Qingsi 耶律慶嗣 in 1094, the owner's image is that of a brave and loyal figure, and the inscription cites Confucius's words to underscore his traits:

“Zhongni [Confucius] said: the North is powerful is because [northerners] sleep on weapons and shields, and never change this habit until their death. In the ancient times, people had heard about this saying [of Confucius], and nowadays we have witnessed a real case.

[Therefore this martial trait] is true!”<sup>51</sup> The Confucius quote in question is recorded in a canonical Confucian text named *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean) compiled during the Warring States period. According to *Zhongyong*, there had been a conversation about “strength” between Confucius and one of his disciples: “Zilu asked what is ‘powerful’.

Confucius says: ‘Is the South more powerful or is the North more powerful? Or is there [something else] you think is more powerful? To spread the teachings by leniency and gentility, and to show tolerance to unreasonable things, these are [the indicators of] the power of the South, where gentlemen reside. To sleep on weapons and shields, and never to change this habit until their death, this is [the indicator of] the power of the North, where strongmen

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<sup>50</sup> The Liao emphasis on its military power and superiority over neighbours will be discussed in the following sections concerning the “central identity” of Liao.

<sup>51</sup> “Yelü Qingsi muzhi” 耶律慶嗣墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Yel ü Qingsi], in *Liaodai shike wenbian*, pp. 456-59, p. 458. 仲尼稱：北方之強者，以其衽金革死而不厭也。古聞其言，今見其事，信哉！

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reside.<sup>52</sup>

The passage in the *Zhongyong* had outlines two different types of “powers” or “strength” ascribed by Confucius to southerners and northerners, by which Confucius seems to emphasise the diverse standards of defining strength and the distinctive images of southerners and northerners at the time. But as we can observe from the inscription written for Yel ü Qingsi, the text employs the second half of the original passage to not only indicate the outstanding military merits of the tomb owner, but also describe him as a “strongman of the northerly direction” indicating the perceived northern position of Liao and the identity of imperial clans as northerners. Although the evidence is little to go by,<sup>53</sup> at the time there may have been other examples like this, especially given the popularity of employing classist expressions to indicate the Liao northern identity during the Liao period.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Chen Zhu 陳柱 (ed.), *Zhongyong zhucan* 中庸注參 [Commentaries on the Doctrine of the Mean] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1931; rpt, 1933), pp. 14-15.

<sup>53</sup> In diplomatic contact with Koryŏ, the Liao court sometimes also employed the term *jin'ge* (weapons and shields). For instance, in the above 1094 Liao edict the text used *jin'ge*, but the edict was investing the heir apparent of the deceased Koryŏ king and the term in the context literally means “wars” which in fact further denotes emergent state affairs. It was employed to express that although the prince was mourning the death of the deceased king he should now turn his filial piety to the loyalty to the country, undertaking the responsibility of governing Koryŏ. See *Koryŏsa*, 6:10.34.

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that the Liao northern identity and its association with martial characters can be also observed, although indirectly, in other pieces of evidence. As mentioned, some tomb inscriptions established the connection between Liao and Kongtong. As will be discussed in the next section, in some classics Kongtong was a place where martial people resided.

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## 2. Liao as the new cosmic centre

In modern scholarship, although much less attention has been paid to the cosmologies and spatial identities of elites with nomadic origins, it is clear that the sense of being the cosmic centre was not unique to elite with a Sinic background. For instance, as reflected in materials written in their native languages, political powers centred on the steppe such as the Mongols had developed similar ideas to Sinic empires that they were the centre of the world and were supreme above all others.<sup>55</sup> As for Liao, largely because of the dearth of materials, we do not have much information about the cosmic centrality of Liao expressed in Kitan language. As Daniel Kane points out, the only attested Kitan word meaning “middle” or “central” is 𐰚𐰝𐰚 found in the lid of an epitaph dedicated to the Liao Daozong Emperor, which appears in between the words “Great” and those representing the state names of Liao.<sup>56</sup> Another word 𐰚𐰝𐰚 found in other tomb inscriptions is also generally translated as “central” because it appears in the same position as 𐰚𐰝𐰚. However, as Kane argues, this is yet to be confirmed and may not have the same meaning as the latter.<sup>57</sup>

But this brief discussion indicates at least that, although less overtly, the sense of being the

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<sup>55</sup> He Qilong 何启龙, “Cong ‘wuse siyi’ yu ‘shiliu daguo’ kan *Baishi* de lishi cengci: bijiao Zangwen ben yu Menggu wenben *Zhang suozhi lun*” 从五色四夷与十六大国看《白史》的历史层次—比较藏文本与蒙古文本《彰所知论》 [On the Historical Layers of the *Baishi* through the “Five Colours and Four Barbarians” and the “Sixteen Great Countries”: A Comparison of *Zhang suozhi lun* between the Tibetan and Mongolian Versions], *Yuanshi ji minzu yu bianjiang yanjiu jikan* 元史及民族与边疆研究集刊 26 (2014), pp. 296-317.

<sup>56</sup> Kane, “The Great Central Liao Kitan State,” p. 38.

<sup>57</sup> Kane, “The Great Central Liao Kitan State,” pp. 36, 38.

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“cosmic centre” had indeed developed in cultures north of the Central Plains and was not exclusive to ideologies of Sinic regimes. It thus provides alternative models and narratives to a world order centred on China proper which was usually adopted by Sinitic historiography.

For Liao, while we do have evidence from Kitan materials showing Liao-centric ideas in a spatial/cosmic sense, the amount is limited. Due to this paucity of Kitan materials, the present chapter will primarily discuss evidence found in Sinitic materials. As detailed in Chapter I, Sinitic was not a foreign language in the Liao historical context. It was also the very use of Sinitic which enables us to see the ways by which the Liao elite challenged the north-China centred narratives, because the employment of Sinitic situated the Liao discourse in the language and cultural context of its Sinic neighbours. While the Kitan language indeed could provide a space to freely express Liao-centric cosmic/spatial models, when entering the sphere of Sinitic, the Liao elite would inevitably encounter scholarship and discourses shaped around a pre-existing “older” cosmic centre – the northern China plains, and faced the problem of how to place the Liao within this pre-existing cosmological structure.

Records from Sinitic texts are no less valuable than those recorded in Kitan as evidence for an investigation into Liao dynastic identities. Through diplomatic documents written in Sinitic the Liao elite could promulgate Liao-centric ideas or information on the Liao representative cosmic patrons as a northern dynasty to a much wider audience depending on the context. It is also from tomb inscriptions written in Sinitic that we can catch hints of the ways by which the Liao elite from different backgrounds interpreted Liao spatial identities in

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their private space, which may well mirror the impact of public and official discourse on the elite culture. In short, the Sinitic language provided an open space for the negotiation of distinct ideologies, and our Sinitic sources are manifestations of these interacting and negotiating discourses. It is within this “common cultural space” we can see that the Liao elite was at work modifying and reinterpreting classical scholarship, challenging the old discourse centred on China proper, and claiming a distinct place and identity in the contemporary world for Liao.

### **The Central Kingdom**

In English the country we now call “China” is known as *Zhongguo* in Chinese language, literally meaning the “Central Kingdom.” Although in the modern context *Zhongguo* primarily refers to a sovereign state, in premodern times it was a self-centric expression, which held multiple connotations. The earliest extant instance of the term *Zhongguo* appears on a bronze wine vessel dated to the early Western Zhou dynasty (ca.1046-771 BCE). It primarily denotes areas of the new eastern capital of the Zhou dynasty – Chengzhou 成周, established near present-day Luoyang and completed during the reign of the second Zhou ruler.<sup>58</sup> The building of the new capital was said to be based on, according to interpretations of classics, empirical investigation of the location of the centre of the earth,<sup>59</sup> and more

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<sup>58</sup> See, for instance, Hu, *Wei zai siming*, pp. 255-56; Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄, *Tongyi yu fenlie: Zhongguo lishi de qishi* 统一与分裂—中国历史的启示 [Unity and Fragmentation: enlightenment of Chinese history] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2013), pp. 18-20.

<sup>59</sup> Shi Ningzhong 史宁中, “Zhaizi Zhongguo: Zhouren queding ‘dizhong’ de dili he wenhua yiju” 宅兹中国：周人确定“地中”的地理和文化依据 [Residing in the “Central Kingdom”: the geographical and



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broadly, the centre of the whole universe. One passage in the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou) instructs on how to locate the centre of the universe through empirical methods and the benefits of identifying the centre: “By using the sundial [one] can measure the scope of the earth, and by adjusting the angle between the beam of light and the flat surface, we can find the centre of the earth...”<sup>60</sup> This place was not only the earthly centre but also the centre of the universe, because it was “where the heaven and earth are in concord, where the four seasons join together, where the winds and rains meet, and where the *yin* and *yang* are in harmony. In this situation, all will be prosperous and settled, thus [this place is] suitable to build a capital.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, this Chengzhou area was not simply where a new capital should be located, but embodied the centre of the earth and the universe where everything was in harmony.

The connotations of *Zhongguo* gradually multiplied over the course of the following centuries, and its boundaries were generally changeable and fluid. With the growing strength of the Zhou vassal states, they began to regard their capital areas and their own states as *Zhongguo* as well. This extended usage of *Zhongguo* laid the foundations for the term to further denote, as a collective concept, the whole region under the authority, both factual and nominal, of Zhou.<sup>62</sup> Accompanying the expansion of *Zhongguo* in geopolitical dimensions, the term

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cultural criteria for the Zhou elite to locate the “Centre of Earth”], *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 (2012:6), pp. 4-15.

<sup>60</sup> Zhao Boxiong 趙伯雄 (ed.), *Zhouli zhushu* 周禮注疏 [Commentaries on the *Rites of Zhou*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), p. 250. 以土圭之法測土深，正日景，以求地中。

<sup>61</sup> Zhao, *Zhouli zhushu*, p. 252-53. 天地之所合也，四時之所交也，風雨之所會也，陰陽之所和也。

<sup>62</sup> Hu, *Wei zai siming*, pp. 257-58; Ge, *Tongyi yu fenlie*, pp. 20-22.

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became a shared identity which differentiated those under Zhou authority from “barbarians” beyond the “civilised world.” *Zhongguo* thus also acquired cultural and ethnic-like implications to indicate a group of people who supposedly possessed superior culture and an advanced civilisation.<sup>63</sup>

But within the areas under Zhou authority, within Sinitic historiography there also appears a perceived distinction between different vassal states and regions. In its narrower sense, *Zhongguo* was equivalent to the Central Plains – the vast Yellow River basin and the regimes based there.<sup>64</sup> The land known as the Central Plains was the heartland of many regimes, including the mythical Xia dynasty, the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the Han and Tang empires, and also the contemporaries of Liao, Northern Song. Prior to the eleventh century, the area had long been the cultural, economic, and demographical centre in Eastern Eurasia.

Occupation of Central Plains was therefore by this time one of the most important factors in bolstering the legitimacy of a regime.<sup>65</sup> Although the development of southern China in

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<sup>63</sup> Hu, *Wei zai siming*, pp. 258-64; Ge, *Tongyi yu fenlie*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>64</sup> Hu, *Wei zai siming*, pp. 259-60; Ge, *Tongyi yu fenlie*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>65</sup> On the basic determinant elements of dynastic legitimacy in history, see for instance, Dong Enlin 董恩林, “Shilun lishi zhengtong guan de qi yuan yu nei han” 试论历史正统观的起源于内涵 [Discussion on the Origin and Connotation of the Discourse on Historical Legitimacy], *Shixue lilun yanjiu* 史学理论研究 (2005: 2), pp. 14-17. On the historical debate on legitimacy, see for instance, Chen Fangming 陈芳明, “Songdai zhengtong lun de xingcheng beijing jiqi neirong: cong shixueshi de guandian shitan songdai shixue zhiyi” 宋代正統論的形成背景及其內容--從史學史的觀點試探宋代史學之一 [The Background and Content of the Theories of Legitimation of The Song – On the Song Histories from the Historiographical Perspective: One], *Shihuo yuekan* 食貨月刊 (1971:1), pp. 16-28. Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China*, pp. 26-38. Rao Zongyi 饶宗颐, *Zhongguo shixue shang zhi zhengtong lun* 中国史学上之正統論 [Discourse on Legitimacy in Chinese Historiography] (Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe, 1996).

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terms of economy and culture after the eleventh and twelfth centuries gradually decentralised the Central Plains, the idea that the Central Plains were key to a dynasty's legitimacy would linger on in later political, cultural and cosmological discourses, perpetuating even into the last imperial dynasty, Qing, and the Republican era.<sup>66</sup>

### Structures of the cosmos

Scholarship of classics and historical works written in Sinitic provides multiple models of cosmic structure and of relationships between the Central Kingdom and its surrounding world. For instance, one model found in the *Shujing* 書經 or *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents) interprets the civilised world as one consisting of nine provinces divided by Great Yu, the mythical sage who successfully tamed the floods and restored the world into order and civilisation.<sup>67</sup> The “Five (or Nine) Zones of Submission” was another model. It conceived of the world as divided into five or nine concentric zones, and the farther the distance from the imperial centre the less influence of civilisation would exert itself.<sup>68</sup> As for interpretations concerning the surrounding peoples of “the Central Kingdom,” there was another canonical model which had left a deep imprint on the conceived structure of many Sinitic historical works. According to the narratives in the *Liji* 禮記 (Book of Rites), the world consisted of

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<sup>66</sup> On the Qing legitimization discourse, see for instance, Yang Nianqun 杨念群, *Hechu shi “Jiangnan”?* *Qingchao zhengtong guan de queli yu shilin jingshen de bianyi* 何处是“江南”？清朝正统观的确立与士林精神的变异 [Where is “Jiangnan”? The Establishment of the Qing Legitimacy and the Changes of the Mental World of Literati] (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi Sanlian shudian, 2010).

<sup>67</sup> Liao Mingchun 廖名春 and Chen Ming 陳明 (eds.), *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 [Orthodox Commentaries on the *Book of Documents*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 132-71.

<sup>68</sup> Liao and Chen, *Shangshu zhengyi*, pp. 165-71.

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five types of peoples in the five cardinal directions, with the Central Kingdom (*Zhongguo*) at the centre, surrounded by uncivilised barbarians in the other four directions: Yi to the east, Man to the south, Rong to the west and Di to the north. These “barbarians” are noted to have distinct customs from residents of the Central Kingdom. For instance, the Man barbarians to the south “have tattooed forehead and crossed legs. They do not eat cooked food” 雕題交趾，有不火食者矣。The Di barbarians to the north “wear feathers and furs, live in caves, and do not eat food made from grains” 衣羽毛穴居，有不粒食者矣。<sup>69</sup> As we can see, in the *Liji* the depictions of the dressings and eating habits of these “barbarians” aim to highlight their uncivilised nature. This interpretation of the world surrounding *Zhongguo* found in the *Liji* set a model for many later Sinitic historical works.<sup>70</sup>

However, these models were not part of the integral and systematic knowledge about the cosmos, and appear discursively in various canonical works. To offer a modification of what Nicolas Tackett has argued, it may be difficult to “reconcile” these differing cosmic models with one another.<sup>71</sup> But I would suggest that this apparent difficulty also meant that one had

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<sup>69</sup> Gong Kangyun 龔抗雲 (ed.), *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 [Orthodox Commentaries on the *Book of Rites*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 398-99.

<sup>70</sup> For instance, *Jin shu* 晉書 [Book of Jin], *Sui shu* 隋書 [Book of Sui], *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 [Old Book of Tang], *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 [New Book of Tang], *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰宇記 [Universal Records of the Taiping Era], *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 [The Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era], *Cefu yuangui*, etc.

<sup>71</sup> Tackett, *The Origin of the Chinese Nation*, p. 154. Tackett gives the example that the model of Nine Provinces was not reconcilable with that of the concentric Five (or Nine) Zones. However, I argue sometimes it is not a matter of whether the models were compatible with one other, but a matter of in what context they had been employed. For instance, the models of Nine Provinces and Five Zones appear together in one article – the *Yu Gong* of *Shujing*, with the former describing the geopolitical division of the

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multiple options at hand and the freedom to select the most relevant model or that optimal to promote a distinct agenda. As Tackett suggests for the case of Northern Song, this meant that, “in particular social and political circumstances, members of society can turn to a repertoire of different ideas and notions...all deemed legitimate even if they do not fit together into a coherent whole.”<sup>72</sup> As we shall see, this was also the case for the Liao elite, who constructed the spatial centrality of Liao via making selections of what they considered legitimate interpretations from the many pre-existing models.

### **The Pole Star and the interpretation of a Liao-centric world order**

The title of this chapter, “under the pole star is the Central Kingdom,” is a quotation ascribed to the Liao Daozong Emperor from the *Song Mo jiwen* 鬆漠紀聞. According to the account, one day a Confucian tutor was instructing Daozong on readings of the *Analects*. When the tutor reached a line whereby Confucius says that “The Pole Star resides at a permanent place and it is orbited by all other stars,” Emperor Daozong responded, “I heard that ‘under the Pole Star is the Central Kingdom’. Here [Liao] is [the Central Kingdom], isn’t it?”<sup>73</sup>

Although it is unclear that to what extent the record resembled what Emperor Daozong

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realm, and the latter the differences of responsibility of tributary. In other words, the two models are concerned with two distinctive topics, and thus there is a question of whether they should be compared without discussion of their contexts. Simply because the two models are about two different themes, it is thus not surprised to see that they conceived of the structure of the world differently, which means in fact they are not conflict with one another at all.

<sup>72</sup> Tackett, *The Origin of the Chinese Nation*, pp. 154-55.

<sup>73</sup> Hong Hao 洪皓, *Song Mo jiwen* 鬆漠紀聞 [Records of Song and Mo], in *Siku quanshu buzheng* 四庫全書補正 [Complements to the *Siku quanshu*] (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1998), 2.506.

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actually said at that moment, the passage emphasises connections between the Pole Star, the Central Kingdom, and the Liao state. But why was the Pole Star significant in the Liao context and what did it imply in Liao discourse? What was the relationship between the Pole Star and the Central Kingdom? What were their connections with the Liao state?

### ***The Pole Star in the heaven***

In different areas of knowledge, the cosmic centre could be interpreted differently. Apart from an earthly centre, *Zhongguo*, in Sinic cosmology there was another centre in the heaven: the Pole Star. Ancient astrologists noticed that all other stars seemed to move in orbit of the Pole Star, and the perceived static position of the Pole Star in the heavens thus gradually began to represent something enduring and central. Therefore, long before the imperial era, due to its perceived endurance, stability, and the centripetal power, the Pole Star gained importance within Sinic belief, representing the origin, the centre, and laws for all to operate, and becoming a supreme spirit in religious belief and doctrinal scholarship like Confucianism and Daoism. Since the Qin period, worship of the spirit of Pole Star had also been an important state-level practice, the centrality of which was expressed not only in the classics but also in religious ritual.<sup>74</sup> For ancient observers, the Pole Star was always observed in the northerly direction in the sky. It was therefore referred to as *beichen* 北辰 or *beiji* 北極, literally the “North Star” and “North Pole.” Importantly, also because of its perceived central location and

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<sup>74</sup> Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光 “Zhongmiao zhimen: Beiji yu Taiyi, Dao, Taiji” 衆妙之門—北極與太一、道、太極 [The Gate to All Marvels: The Pole Star, Dao, and Taiji], *Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化 (1990:2), pp. 46-65.

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endurance, the Pole Star became a symbol for the imperial position, gaining names such as *tiandi xing* 天帝星 (The Heavenly Imperial Star).

In Sinic philosophy, however, there was no direct spatial connection between the Pole Star and *Zhongguo*. In classical scholarship, they were employed in different discourses, and did not justify one another. While the centrality of Pole Star normally appears in astrological, religious, and philosophical discourses concerning the cult of spirits and relationship between human beings and nature, that of *Zhongguo* normally appears in discourses concerning relationships between different groups of peoples, civilisations, and geographical regions. Each implies the cosmic centre in their respective contexts, but the central place ascribed to them had different ideological and cosmological bases.

There was indeed an invented correspondence between the heavenly and earthly realms in the ideology of *fenye* 分野 (field allocation), but connections were not generally made to the Pole Star. The system correlates heavenly bodies and constellations with earthly mythical/factual political or administrative divides, which was derived from the belief that human/earthly affairs ran in accordance with the operation of heavenly bodies. The twelve Jupiter stations, and the twenty-eight lunar mansions, or their individual heavenly bodies, corresponded with, varying according to different interpretations, the Twelve Provinces divided by Yao, the Nine Provinces by Yu, the feudal polities during the Warring States era, or the factual administrative divides of historical or contemporary regimes, etc. The Sinic world was the place on which these heavenly bodies and constellations projected themselves.

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The striking thing is that the Pole Star was not amongst them. It is of course a fact that Sinic regimes such as Northern Song sometimes employed Pole Star to refer to itself on occasions including diplomatic contact with its vassal states.<sup>75</sup> But this is merely a metaphor to emphasise the supremacy of Song by appropriating the sacredness of the heavenly centre, rather than a claim based on any constructed spatial connections between the two by a pre-existing cosmic model (such as the *fenye* system). The Pole Star had nothing to do with how and where the centre of the earth *Zhongguo* was located, and *vice versa*. However, as will be discussed, the Liao elite invented a new earthly/cosmic centre, the justification of which was its spatial connection with the Pole Star. And as we shall see, in the Liao cosmology the world consisted of four cardinal directions, and the north, where Liao was situated, was also the location of the cosmic centre. Depending on the context, either Liao's northern identity or central identity could be emphasised.

*Liao, the Pole Star, and the cosmic centre: a case study of Liao-centric ideology in Liao-Koryŏ diplomacy*

Since the cardinal directions are a relational concept, the possession of a central place in the universe can only be justified by its relationship with the “margins.” The growth in power of the Liao state since the early tenth century, and its military and diplomatic success in bringing multiple surrounding forces under its authority, laid firm foundations for the Liao elite to shape a Liao-centric worldview. Because of the relative abundance of materials, this section

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<sup>75</sup> For instance, in a 990 edict sent from Song to Koryŏ a passage describes Koryŏ as “orbiting the Pole Star (North Pole, *beiji*), being our eastern fence.” *Song da zhaoling ji*, 237.924. 爰自拱於北極，為我東藩。



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will take the Liao-Koryŏ relationship as an example to discuss the ways by which the Liao elite expressed their centrality in cosmos.

Although the aforementioned episode of Liao Daozong's reflection on the Pole Star recorded in the *LS* was compiled two hundred years after the demise of Liao, to refer to Liao as the Pole Star was a popular practice during the Liao period. Most of our evidence is found in Liao materials such as inscriptions on temple stelae and those discovered from tombs, as well as diplomatic documents exchanged between Liao and its vassal states, especially Koryŏ. Koryŏ had been a vassal state of the Tang Empire from the seventh to the ninth centuries. Following the power vacuum in Northeast Asia after the collapse of Uighur and Tang empires, the expansion of Liao to the east and Koryŏ to the north brought the two states into direct contact and confrontation, causing diplomatic crises and military conflicts. After several campaigns in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, by virtue of its military strength Liao successfully established overlordship over Koryŏ, and forced it to sever diplomatic contact and its previous overlord-vassal relationship with Northern Song.<sup>76</sup> Their intensive diplomatic communication is primarily preserved in *Koryŏsa* - the *History of Koryŏ*. It records multiple types of diplomatic information, a large proportion of which are imperial edicts from Liao to Koryŏ granting gifts and official titles, or investing Koryŏ kings and princes.

In the tenth century, in Northern Song imperial edicts sent to vassal states such as Koryŏ,

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<sup>76</sup> Mote, *Imperial China*, pp. 60-62; Tao, *Song Liao guanxi shi yanjiu*, pp. 169-72.

regimes in northern Vietnam, the Dali Kingdom, and the Tibetan tribes, there is an evident preference for concepts which contain terms related to “centre” which could directly express a Song-centric idea, such as *Zhongxia* (中夏 Central Grandeur), *Zhongchao* (中朝 Central Dynasty), *Zhongbang* (中邦 Central State), or *Zhongguo* (中國 Central Kingdom), etc.<sup>77</sup> As mentioned, sometimes it also employed the Pole Star to underscore the superiority and centrality of Northern Song within the interstate hierarchy. To compare with Northern Song, the Liao elite does seem to favour the Pole Star over terms containing central/centre to denote the Liao overlordship. At least in diplomatic documents exchanged with Koryŏ, to refer to Liao as the Pole Star was a popular practice. For instance, after Liao launched their first invasion of Koryŏ in 993 of which a consequence was that Koryŏ agreed to shift its allegiance from Northern Song to Liao, and in 996 the Liao court sent envoys to Koryŏ formally investing the reigning ruler Wang Ci 왕치 王治 (r. 981-997) as the King of Koryŏ. The investiture edict was written in a tone of Liao patronage, the long text which includes the passage: “[You, the King of Koryŏ, who rules] the land beyond the Eastern Sea, are able to hold the kingship by means of coming to pay submission to the Pole Star. Time changes, but you have never been slack in offering us visits and obedience. It is appropriate that [I] hold the ceremony of investiture in order to praise your sincerity of submission.”<sup>78</sup> “The land beyond the Eastern Sea” refers to the Koryŏ state which was perceived by the Liao elite to lie in the cardinal direction of east of Liao. Their overlord-vassal relationships is made evident not only by the conferral of titles to Koryŏ monarchs and wording such as Koryŏ’s “obedience” and “submission,” but also through mention of the Pole Star, which denotes

<sup>77</sup> See for instance, *Song da zhaoling ji*, 237.926; 238.930; 239.935; 239.937.

<sup>78</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 3:3.29. 惟東溟之外域，順北極以來王。

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Liao's spatial/cosmic centrality and superiority.

The Koryŏ side also referred to Liao as the Pole Star in a diplomatic manner, in a display of its acceptance of Liao's hegemonic status and the Liao diplomatic discourse. For example, in 1037, when a new Koryŏ ruler, Wang Hyeong 왕형 王亨 (r. 1035-1046), ascended to the throne succeeding his brother, he sent envoys to Liao to reaffirm the suzerain-vassal relationship between Liao and Koryŏ. The letter returned to Liao reads that "[Our] Eastern Land venerates the Pole Star. We have been paying obedience to Your Majesty every year, and each generation in turn reports our responsibility [to Your Majesty]." <sup>79</sup> To denote Koryŏ as an "eastern" state and Liao as the Pole Star (*beichen*), mirroring its central place within the interstate hierarchy, was thus a mutually recognised practice in diplomatic contact between the two regimes. <sup>80</sup> In diplomatic contact with Koryŏ, similar expressions make a frequent appearance, although in their written form the vocabulary is variable – sometimes *beiji*, sometimes *beichen*, or *chenji*, etc. They nevertheless refer to the same thing – the Pole Star, in reference to Liao and its superiority and centrality.

This Liao-Koryŏ employment of the Pole Star in political and interstate contexts is a legacy from antiquity. In the aforementioned *Song Mo jiwen* conversation about the Pole Star between a Confucian tutor and Daozong, the tutor's reflections in fact concerned a popular Confucian belief quite different to Daozong's response. The full saying of Confucius

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<sup>79</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 4:6.12-13. 但茲東域，仰戴北辰，連年不絕以勤王，遞代相傳而述職。

<sup>80</sup> For a similar argument, see Mori, "Jūichi seiki kōhan ni okeru HokuSō no kokusaiteki chii ni tsuite," p. 290.

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recorded in the *Analects* that was partly cited by Daozong's tutor is that "Governing by means of morality would make [monarchs] like the Pole Star, which is located at its fixed place and surrounded by all the other stars."<sup>81</sup> The original saying aimed to express one of the most important Confucian values that monarchs should govern the country and people in accordance with moral principles. Only if that was so could a monarch be followed and obeyed by their subjects, just like all the other stars orbiting the Pole Star. In fact, the Liao-Koryŏ diplomatic letters sometimes also made allusions to this idea from the *Analects*. For instance, a Liao imperial edict sent to Koryŏ in 1038 in response to Wang Hyeong's 1037 letter reads that: "[You, the King of Koryŏ] rules the Eastern Land, which orbits the Pole Star as [many other] stars do. [You] are serious in serving your suzerain, and [we] should hold a ceremony to acknowledge your good deeds."<sup>82</sup> In the same year, another investiture edict made a similar point: "If [common] stars orbit the North (abbreviation for North Star – the Pole Star) rightly, it conforms to the rules; if the Jiang and Han [rivers] find their way to the main stream, then they will flow smoothly."<sup>83</sup> The hierarchical relationship between Liao and Koryŏ is presented as parallel to the interpersonal relationship between a monarch and his subjects recorded in the *Analects*. And by employing the Pole Star and its surrounding stars, both Koryŏ and Liao emphasise the cosmic centrality and the political superiority of Liao, and the status of Koryŏ as a vassal state.

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<sup>81</sup> Zhu Hanmin 朱漢民 (ed.), *Lunyu zhushu* 論語注疏 [Commentaries on the *Analects*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), p. 14. 爲政以德，譬如北辰，居其所而衆星共之。

<sup>82</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 4:6.17. 地控東域，星環北辰。

<sup>83</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 4:6.18. 星辰在拱北之躔，則爲合度；江漢得朝宗之路，乃是安流。

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Sometimes in diplomatic letters sent to Koryŏ Liao mentions other states as well, especially Xi Xia to the west and Northern Song to the south. For instance, in 1035, because of a territorial dispute between Liao and Koryŏ, Liao sent a letter to warn the Koryŏ court not to provoke conflict between the two states. To describe the contemporaneous interstate relationships, it says “Now [our] emperor has succeeded the imperial throne of previous sages, and governed the lands that reach as far as the borders of the Eight Quarters. The imperial ruler of Southern Xia admires our righteousness, so they have concluded friendly relations [with us]; the lords of the Western Land admire our virtue and pay tributes [to us] from afar; the land of Eastern Sea is the only place not yet fully accepting the nobleness of the Pole Star.”<sup>84</sup> The letter mentions three regimes to their east, west and south, and employs the Pole Star (*beiji*, North Pole) to denote Liao itself. Mori suggests that the passage mirrors a constructed correspondence between regimes and cardinal directions in the Liao discourse, by which Liao is a “northern” state. And to denote a “northern” Liao by use of the term of Pole Star, the letter expresses a Liao idea in which Liao is both the “north” and the “centre.”<sup>85</sup> I have independently reached a conclusion similar to Mori’s on this 1035 passage, but I argue that this specific passage is quite exceptional and any conclusion must be contextualised. Without a discussion of the context, Mori’s above conclusion is oversimplistic and misleading, thus some important issues concerning the Pole Star and its relevance to cardinal directions must be clarified.

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<sup>84</sup> *Koryŏsa*, 4:6.3. 今皇上紹累聖之基，垺統八方之國界，南夏帝主永慕義以通歡，西土諸王長向風而納款，唯獨東溟之域，未賓北極之尊。

<sup>85</sup> Mori, “Jūichi seiki kōhan ni okeru HokuSō no kokusaiteki chii ni tsuite,” p. 290.

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The key question to be answered is why, as controversial as it had been, the north could also be the centre at the same time in Liao discourse. We will leave this question to the next section, and will first examine some relevant issues which to help us tackle the key question. First, it should be noted that the Pole Star should not be mistaken for the representative heavenly body of the cardinal direction of north, which was in fact symbolised merely by mansions collectively known as Xuanwu 玄武, Black Tortoise. Rather, as discussed, the Pole Star was the symbol of the cosmic centre. Although in Sinitic “Pole Star” sometimes contains the character *bei* (north), such as in *beiji* and *beichen*, they are standalone compound proper nouns which do not represent any direction other than a central place. As mentioned, the “north” merely indicates where the star was observed and the Pole Star symbolised cosmic centrality. It was because of these central connotations that the Pole Star was constantly evoked in political, religious or various other discourses and employed by monarchs to denote related imperial designations during and prior to Liao.

Second, it is also important to identify the *contexts* in which the Pole Star appears. In documents exchanged with Song, the Pole Star was never employed by the Liao elite to denote Liao. The very reason is that Liao and Song agreed diplomatic parity following the Chanyuan Treaty in 1005, and the Liao elite clearly knew that the Pole Star represented the cosmic centre, and that the usage of which would provoke the Song court. On the contrary, the unrestrained employment of the Pole Star and the use of other wording that implies Liao supremacy is primarily found in diplomatic documents involving the Liao vassal state Koryŏ. In this overlord-vassal context, both the Liao and Koryŏ elites emphasise Liao’s central

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position in the interstate hierarchy and cosmos, while the Liao self-chosen representative cosmic elements are normally those associated with the north. For instance, in the 1035 Liao letter in question, the expression of “Now [our] emperor has succeeded the imperial throne of previous sages, and governed the lands that reach as far as the borders of the Eight Quarters” in fact highlights Liao as the “central” state which was ruled by successive “sage” emperors, the authority of which extended in all the cardinal directions of the world (Eight Quarters). Therefore the central theme, via employing the Pole Star (North Pole) is here primarily to highlight the central position of Liao in the cosmos rather than its northern identity.

The Liao elite seem never to have employed the Xuanwu – Black Tortoise – as the representative heavenly body for Liao. This seems to be because that, while the elements such as colours and agents did not naturally carry connotations of superiority and inferiority, there was always an explicit distinction between the Pole Star and others in terms of hierarchy and importance. To underscore the Liao “northern” identity to a Liao vassal state on diplomatic occasions would risk implying some level of equality between them. In other words, the choice to employ the Pole Star in the diplomatic discourses of Liao and Koryŏ was not to emphasise the Liao northern identity, but its original symbolism as representing the centre of the cosmos, otherwise there would be no reason to evoke the concept at all.

Third, it does not mean that the Pole Star had no spatial connection with the cardinal direction of north. As will be discussed in detail later, in Sinic classical discourse the earthly northern realm was believed to be where the Pole Star projected itself on the earth. That is, the

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heavenly centre corresponded with the earthly northern direction. And it was based on this interpretation that, as we shall see, in the tenth and eleventh centuries the Liao elite established a connection between Liao and the Pole Star, although this attempt itself presented some apparent difficulties in interpreting the Liao spatial/geographical identities within Liao domestic discourse.

Of course, on the surface level it seems contradictory that a regime on the one hand should employ the Pole Star to emphasise its cosmic centrality and on the other hand concurrently choose elements representing north to characterise its identity. This apparent contradiction primarily appears in materials for Liao internal consumption, and derives from Liao attempts to connect the Liao state to the Pole Star - an invented connection which was at first based on the acceptance of Liao as a “northern” state, on which the Pole Star projected itself. As discussed, in the classics the Pole Star and an earthly centre did not justify one another, and it was the very attempt to invent and to establish their connections during the Liao period that created the controversy.

In fact, on diplomatic occasions it makes sense once one contextualises the usage of the Pole Star. As mentioned, the cosmic centrality of Liao was rarely mentioned in diplomatic correspondence with Song. The Liao side did not present Liao as symbolised by the Pole Star, or to explain the connections between Liao, the north, and the cosmic centre represented by the Pole Star. In documents exchanged with Koryŏ, diplomatic letters were of course not the place for lengthy explanations of why the Liao was both a northern and central state as



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interpreted in domestic sources either. In communication with their vassal, the main motivation to evoke the Pole Star by the Liao elite was as a symbol representing the cosmic centre and manifesting Liao's supreme position in the interstate system.

This was in fact also the case for Liao's contemporary, Northern Song. The Song court did not employ rhetoric like the Pole Star to denote Song superiority in their letters sent to Liao, but this absence in Liao-Song diplomacy did not stop the Song elite using it and treating Song as the centre of the universe in domestic discourse and in communication with Song vassal states. This further clarifies that the Pole Star should not be mistaken as representing cardinal directions other than the centre. With Liao, the Song side normally addressed itself as a Southern Dynasty. And as for the representative elements for Song, the Song court employed Fire and Red which stood for the cardinal direction of south. The above choices and cosmic representative elements indicating Song identity were not contradictory, because they were used in different contexts, and derived from different interpretations of antiquity. When the context and audiences changed, the presented identity of a regime was also liable to change.

To summarise the above discussion, the employment of Pole Star drew attention to the idea that Liao was the cosmic centre, and whether the Pole Star bore the implication of north was situational and this usage of the Pole Star was quite exceptional. Although in Sinitic sometimes the Pole Star is expressed by terms containing *bei* (north), it should not be confused with the cardinal direction of north. These are two different concepts emphasised in distinct contexts to underscore different identities of Liao, although in certain situations they

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might converge. The 1035 letter sent to Koryŏ was exceptional. The presence of west, east and south, and the particular usage of *beiji* (North Pole) seem to convey double implications. The character of *bei* (North) in *beiji* (North Pole), and the Pole Star as a symbol for centre indicate that Liao represented two cardinal directions at the same time, as both a northern and a central state. However, it should be clear that what the employment of the Pole Star as a symbol of Liao emphasises is in essence Liao's status as a cosmic centre, and the central theme of employing the Pole Star is always to emphasise Liao as a central state. Its identity as a northern regime was one with ramifications depending on the specific context. When it appears, the northern identity was not the priority to be presented to the audience, because the Pole Star when applied in diplomatic correspondence was restricted to communication with Liao subordinates, the aim of which was always to emphasise Liao superiority and centrality in the interstate hierarchy. The ramified implications of "north" in this context primarily derived from a need for literary embellishment.

### ***Connecting Liao with the Pole Star through the cardinal direction of north***

Departing from above discussion, we must now return to the key issue of whether the employment of the Pole Star by the Liao elite was simply classical phrasing to express Liao centrality, or was it a claim based on newly constructed connections between Liao and the Pole Star? If this was merely a matter of wording, then the Liao employment of the Pole Star to express its superiority was nothing new, having been popular practice throughout Eastern Eurasian history. As previously seen in correspondence with vassal rulers, Northern Song normally employed terms such as the "Central State" to indicate its centrality in the cosmos.

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But the Song court did sometimes employ alternative expressions such as *beichen* (North Star/Pole Star) to refer to itself in their diplomatic letters. This indicates that the symbolism of Pole Star for cosmic centre was a legacy from antiquity that could be used by anyone and was not exclusive to Liao. For Song, the Pole Star was one of the many ways to express its spatial/cosmic centrality to its vassal states on diplomatic occasions, and this does not mean that the Song legitimacy in space/cosmos rested upon any direct connection with the Pole Star. The Pole Star was neither the justifier nor the theoretical basis for buttressing and constructing Song legitimacy as a cosmic centre, which in spatial terms was primarily justified by its possession of the Central Plains and other criteria such as self-perceived cultural superiority and the upholding of moral principles. In addition, the representative cosmic elements of Song were the agent of Fire and the colour of Red, which were associated with the cardinal direction of south. Song sources interpreted the founding emperor of Song as having inherited the essence of the Red Lord – the guardian deity of the south, and the ritual of sacrifices to the Red Lord was also a state-level religious practice. In short, in the Song discourse, the Pole Star was merely a symbol expressing a Song-centric idea of the cosmos. There was no constructed link between the Pole Star and the centrality and dynastic legitimacy of Song.

In contrast, as we shall see in this section, when it comes to the Liao employment of the Pole Star, it is not only a symbol for Liao centrality, but was based on a reinterpretation of classical scholarship, which established a direct connection between Liao and the Pole Star, which was perceived to grant Liao with the legitimacy to claim its earthly and cosmic

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centrality. What was this connection? How did the Liao elite link their state with the Pole Star?

And what was the classical basis?

From extant evidence, it is clear that the Liao employment of the Pole Star was not merely diplomatic rhetoric used in the same way as Northern Song, but based on the connection between Liao and the “northern realm,” and by extension one between this “northern realm” and the Pole Star. As previously outlined, classical scholarship on cosmic structure was mostly Sinocentric. In fact, the construction of the cosmic centrality of the Liao state was partly derived from their acceptance of this classical discourse. Specifically, Liao centrality was based on the premise that Liao was located in the northern realm, which firstly implies a Liao acceptance of a cosmic model in which steppe peoples and regimes were assigned to the north and treated as northerners. However, it was also based on this northern direction in relation to the Central Kingdom of northern China that the Liao elite found connections between Liao and the heavenly centre – the Pole Star.

Instances of the Liao elite treating Liao as the Pole Star are present in various sources, such as tomb inscriptions, Liao diplomatic letters with Koryŏ, and some Song-Yuan histories. This indicates that it was a very popular practice among the Liao and contemporary elites. On the superficial level, this upholding of the Pole Star and related cosmological implications by the Liao elite could be said to indicate the “sinicisation” of Liao. For instance, in relationships with Koryŏ the Liao court employed similar rhetoric used by Tang and Song, making it seem like Liao had assumed their mantle and taken their place as the new overlord of Koryŏ, as if

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Liao was another sinicised nomadic state which had been absorbed into an all-embracing Chinese culture and enjoyed the central status in an interstate hierarchy of other Chinese regimes such as Han, Tang and Song. Indeed, when employed by the Liao elite in diplomatic exchanges with Liao vassal states the Pole Star primarily functioned as an indicator of the overlord-vassal relationship between Liao and its neighbours. But differently to diplomatic occasions where Liao focused on its relationship with its vassals expressed through the Pole Star to stress its centrality, domestic sources present evidence on how the Liao elite viewed the relationship between Liao and Pole Star. This answers the question of why the Liao elite saw Liao as the Pole Star, which was not simply a diplomatic metaphor but rather was based on a reinterpretation of the Star's connotations. It was based on this newly reconstructed connection between Liao and the Pole Star that the elite reinterpreted the location of the centre of the world, which reveals what distinguishes the Liao usage of the Pole Star from that of their Sinic neighbours.

As mentioned, in Sinitic historiography the structure of the cosmos tended to conform to the model of the Peoples of the Five Cardinal Directions. The northern realm, which from the tenth century was under the Liao domination usually appeared as a barbarian land. In their histories, neighbours of Liao based in the "Central Kingdom" also adopted the designations of Northern Di, Southern Man, Western Rong and Eastern Yi as the labels for their surrounding peoples. The Liao regime was normally categorised as Northern Di and as such lay beyond the civilised world.<sup>86</sup> For example, in the first universal geographical treatise of

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<sup>86</sup> These works are, for instance, the late tenth and eleventh centuries *Taiping yulan*, *Taiping huanyu ji*, and *Cefu yuangui*.

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Northern Song compiled during the late tenth and early eleventh century, the author Yue Shi 樂史 (930-1007) not only cited the passage on the four types of barbarians from the *Liji*, but added extra comments. As for the Di of north, he commented that: “[The North] gathers coldness, being extremely frigid, and trees rarely grow there. Therefore [the Di] live in caves. [The North] lacks various types of grain, therefore they do not eat food made of grains.”<sup>87</sup> Through geographical determinism, in Yue Shi’s account the realm north of the Central Kingdom is depicted as harshly cold and not arable, thus implying its unsuitability for the cultivation of human civilisations.

However, as mentioned, the classical interpretations of the cosmic structure were not systematically arranged but diverse and discursive, and could be quite different from one another. The Liao elite had taken up a different interpretation found in the classics, which provided alternative options with which to interpret the cosmic order. While the realm north of the Central Kingdom may not have been centre of the earth, in Confucian classics and later historical works, it did have connections in spatial/cosmic sense with the Pole Star. The northern realm appears as the place upon which the Pole Star projected itself. The Confucian classic *Erya* 爾雅 (Approaching Elegance),<sup>88</sup> the first lexicographic work in Sinic history, provides an alternative interpretation of the structure of the world. According to its account, the whole world consisted of multiple layers, with the *siji* 四極 (the Four Poles) as the

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<sup>87</sup> Yue Shi 樂史, *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰宇記 [Universal Records of the Taiping Era] (Beijing : Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 8:172.3294-95. 凝寒至盛，林木又少，故穴居；亦少五穀，故不粒食也。

<sup>88</sup> The translation is from Victor H. Mair, “*Tzu-shu* 字書 or *tzu-tien* 字典 (Dictionaries),” in William H. Nienhauser, Jr. (ed.), *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature, Volume 2* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 165-172.

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farthest, followed by the nearer *sihuang* 四荒 (Four Desolations) and *sihai* 四海 (Four Seas). The *Erya* interprets that the peoples of Man, Yi, Rong, and Di resided in this *sihai* zone.<sup>89</sup> However, there was another layer nearest to the “Central Prefecture.” This consisted of four arenas – Kongtong 空桐 to the north, Taiping 太平 to the south, Dameng 大蒙 to the west, and Danxue 丹穴 to the east. As *Erya* says, “South of the Central Prefecture, Danxue is the place directly under the sun; Kongtong to the north is where the Plough and Pole Star project them on the earth; to the east where the sun rises is Taiping, and to the west where the sun sets marks the Dameng.”<sup>90</sup> *Erya* also ascribes the peoples residing in these four arenas with respective characters: “The people from Taiping are benevolent, the people from Danxue are intelligent, the people from Dameng are faithful, and the people from Kongtong are martial.”<sup>91</sup> Thus *Erya* interprets the north – Kongtong – as where the Pole Star projected itself on the earth, and the people there were considered to be martial, without explicitly imposing barbarian image upon them. The distinction between the nearest layer from the other four included the layer of *sihai* where the Man, Yi, Rong and Di resided, and the assignment of four neutral characters to peoples of this nearest layer, indicates that in *Erya*’s interpretation it was not an uncivilised zone of barbarians.

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<sup>89</sup> Li Chuanshu 李傳書 (ed.), *Erya zhushu* 爾雅注疏 [Commentaries on the *Approaching Elegance*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 198-99.

<sup>90</sup> Li, *Erya zhushu*, p. 199. 岨齊州以南戴日為丹穴，北戴斗極為空桐，東至日所出為太平，西至日所入為大蒙。The Plough, like the Pole Star, was also treated by ancient astrologists as a symbol of the centre of the heaven. Perceived to mirror the location of the “North Pole” more precisely than the Plough, the Pole Star gradually became a more popular symbol for the heavenly centre. Ge, “Zhongmiao zhi men,” pp. 47-48. In Sinitic historiography, *douji*, which combines *dou* (Plough) and *ji* (Pole – the Pole Star), is one of the tropes to denote the heavenly centre.

<sup>91</sup> Li, *Erya zhushu*, p. 199. 太平之人仁，丹穴之人智，大蒙之人信，空桐之人武。

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Of course, although the northern realm – Kongtong – had spatial connections with the Pole Star, in Sinitic historiography this connection had not enabled it to represent the earthly centre. Different from the interpretations of the Peoples of the Five Cardinal Directions found in the *Liji*, in the following two millennia, *Erya*'s interpretation was primarily influential in discussions and historical records on astrology. It was not often employed to frame the discourses concerning the relationships between the “Central Kingdoms” and the surrounding “barbarians.”

But this interpretation of *Erya*, which links the north, Kongtong and the Pole Star, offered an alternative corpus of scholarship with which the Liao elite could reconstruct and reinterpret the cosmic order during the Liao period. As mentioned, it shows a more neutral attitude towards the relationships between the constituent parts of the world, rather than emphasising a hierarchy of civilisation and culture. It is thus understandable that the Liao elite based their discourse on the *Erya*, establishing connections between the Pole Star, the north, Kongtong and Liao, rather than a model which interpreted the north as a barbarian land.

For instance, a tomb inscription written in 993 for the Grand Lady of Xiao, the wife of the Liao Prince of Qin Princedom, reveals a constructed relationship between the Pole Star and Liao. One passage reads that: “[Under] north of the Celestial Street, the imperial house established the state. Under the Plough and Pole Star, the imperial ruler ascended to the



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throne.”<sup>92</sup> These two sentences contain discursive astrological thought from the classics. The historical interpretation was that the constellation of Celestial Street was made up of the two stars belonging to the Net mansion - one of the Chinese twenty-eight lunar mansions. This was considered to be the boundary dividing the Hairy Head and Net mansions.<sup>93</sup> In the system of *fenye*, while the Net mansion, which corresponded with the constellations of Pleiades, was thought to preside over the Sinic realm, the Hairy Head, which corresponded with Hyades, was normally associated with the barbarians of the north and west of the Sinic arena. Therefore, in pre-Liao Sinitic historiography too, the Celestial Street marked the boundary between the barbarians and the Central Kingdom.<sup>94</sup> As such, expressions such as “North of the Celestial Street” denoted the Hairy Head mansion and also the barbarians, and “South of the Celestial Street” corresponded to the Sinic realm. However, in this Liao inscription, the phrase of “north of the Celestial Street” does not imply that Liao was a barbarian state, given that it was composed for a member of the Liao consort clan. Rather, in this context it is neutrally used to denote the “northern realm” in general. And more importantly, this first sentence makes a direct connection between the Liao imperium and “north of the Celestial Street,” highlighting Liao’s status of a legitimate imperial power associated with the direction of north.

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<sup>92</sup> “Han Kuangsi qi Qinguo Taifuren muzhi” 韓匡嗣妻秦國太夫人墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for the Wife of Han Kuangsi – The Grant Lady of the Qin Princedom], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 30-32, p. 30. 若夫天街以北，皇家建其極；斗極之下，王者有其位。

<sup>93</sup> Hu Hong 胡鴻, “Xingkong zhong de Hua Yi zhixu: Liang Han zhi Nan Bei chao shiqi youguan Hua Yi de xingzhan yanshuo” 星空中的華夷秩序—兩漢至南北朝時期有關華夷的星占言說 [The Hua Yi Order in the Heaven: The Astrological Discourses on the Hua and Yi from the Han to Southern and Northern Dynasties], *Wen shi* 文史 1 (2014), pp. 55-74, p. 57.

<sup>94</sup> Hu, “Xingkong zhong de Hua Yi zhixu,” p. 57.

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The second sentence establishes a correlation between the Pole Star (and the Plough) and the Liao state, plainly stating that the place where the Liao monarchs gained their imperial authority was where the Pole Star projected itself. While the first sentence correlates Liao with the north, this second one emphasises the connection of the Liao imperium with the centre of the universe. To treat Liao as a legitimate imperial power in fact already conveys a Liao-centric cosmic structure, and the association between where the Pole Star projected itself and where Liao monarchs took to their imperial throne further underscored the role of the Pole Star in defining Liao as the cosmic centre. And the intermediary which connected Liao and the Pole Star was the cardinal direction of north. That means that in the Liao discourse the establishment of the link between Liao and a cosmic centre was built on the premise of Liao as a “northern” state.

This inscription was written for a prominent Liao figure. In such a tomb inscription the expression of a connection between Liao and the Pole Star implies a construction recognised by the elite. More importantly, its application in a private setting signals an “internal” view held by the Liao elite: relationships between Liao and the Pole Star established through the “north,” which was derived from classical scholarship and should be taken as integral to the Liao elite’s own ideological and cosmological world as opposed to a mere public rhetoric in diplomatic communication.

Further examples of this include a 1045 tomb inscription for the Grand Concubine of the Qin

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Princedom, from the Liao imperial Yel ü clan, which reads that: “North of the Hairy Head, the earth carries the [projection of] Plough and Pole Star; the heaven blesses the virtuous, prospering our state. The dynastic surname is Yel ü, from which our Grand Concubine originated.”<sup>95</sup> Since “North of the Celestial Street” denotes the Hairy Head itself, here in the inscription “North of the Hairy Head” is also a variation of this way to indicate the land north of the Central Kingdom. As the inscription interprets, the northern realm was where the Plough and Pole Star projected themselves and where “our state” – Liao – had risen to power under the patron of the heaven. As discussed in Chapter II, although the Liao elite may have recognised the existence of other emperors, since the eleventh century they acknowledged Liao as the only one in possession of the Mandate of Heaven. This inscription established links between Liao and where the heavenly centre – the Pole Star – projected itself and where the Mandate of Heaven chose its patron, which again presents Liao as the only proper cosmic centre.

Another inscription, from 1058 for a nobleman from the consort clan Xiao Min takes a similar stance. As it records: “The Taizu [Emperor] of our dynasty had the surname of Yel ü. He looked upward into the heaven, being the projection of the Pole Star [on the earth]...[Our state is] embedded with the essence of Kongtong, and obtained the spirit of the Black Lady.”<sup>96</sup> Taizu was the temple name of the first Liao emperor Abaoji, and as the inscription

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<sup>95</sup> “Qinguo Taifei muzhi” 秦國太妃墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for the Grand Concubine of the Qin Princedom], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, p. 90-96, p. 90. 大昴之北，地載斗極。天祚有德，實興我國。國姓曰耶律氏，我故秦國太妃出焉。

<sup>96</sup> “Xiao Min muzhi,” p. 113. 我朝太祖姓耶律，仰視☐象戴北辰...稟空桐之秀氣，剖玄女之靈囡。

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claims he was the embodiment of the cosmic centre symbolised by the Pole Star. The first half of the passage follows the pre-Liao tradition of indicating the legitimate imperial rulers through the Pole Star. However, as the second half of the passage reveals, the connection between Liao as a legitimate imperial power and the heavenly/cosmic centre (the Pole Star) was more than a matter of wording, and rather a new construction via the intermediate concept of the cardinal direction of north. The above record links the Liao imperial house with the Pole Star through Kongtong, an arena north of the Central Prefecture as described in *Erya*, and with Xuannü, the Black Lady, a deity representing the northern direction. The Pole Star in this context is treated as having direct spatial connections with Liao, projecting itself on and thus justifying the Liao imperial lineage. Thus, its function goes far beyond a mere metaphor for imperial monarchs.

The above examples of inscriptions were issued under court orders or written by prestigious Liao scholars, dedicated to members from imperial and consort clans, and used for sacred occasions – funeral memorialisation. They are representative evidence that the connections between Liao and the Pole Star were a commonly recognised construction, at least among the Liao ruling elite. In addition, the above reinterpretations of Liao as the new centre appeared not only in tomb inscriptions dedicated to the so-called Han/Chinese elite who served in the Liao court, but also in inscriptions for the Kitan elite. This can be therefore understood as a shared discourse among the Liao elite that Liao was the new cosmic centre justified by the Pole Star, derived from interpretations of the classics.

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To summarise the discussion in this section, during the Liao period the Liao elite developed a Liao-centric cosmology, in which the Liao state and its imperial house represented the centre of the universe. This Liao-centric ideology was largely reflected by the constructed connections between Liao and the Pole Star. Liao was interpreted in Liao materials as the direct projection of the heavenly centre on earth, which justified Liao political legitimacy and its cosmic centrality. But this invented connection itself was built on the acceptance of Liao as a northern state. The spatial/cosmic identity of Liao was thus double-faceted. Although the representative elements of Liao were mostly those pertaining to the cardinal direction of north, whether to emphasise the Liao as the cosmic centre or to highlight its northern identity was situational and depended on the audience.

### **3. Who was the centre: when the new encountered the old**

As discussed, on diplomatic occasions it was not difficult for the Liao elite to employ the Pole Star to denote the Liao court. Facing different audiences, the Liao elite could either simply emphasise its centrality via the Pole Star or drop this rhetoric to present a situation of diplomatic parity. Apart from the flexibility, the double-faceted identity of Liao as either a northern or central state sometimes also caused ambiguity and difficulty in interpreting the Liao cosmic identity especially in Liao domestic materials. As outlined, in classical discourse the Pole Star represented the centre of universe but where it projected itself on the earth was not. In interpretations involving northern China regimes, the Liao elite had to reflect on the Liao spatial and cosmic relationship with these contemporaries based in the old centre. In

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some cases, we find the Liao elite emphasising the centrality and superiority of Liao, especially when it came to Liao's relationship with tenth-century northern China regimes, mirroring a world order dominated by Liao. In other cases, in particular those concerning the Liao-Song relationship, the emphasis on Liao centrality was less obvious, which might well be due to Liao's recognition of a coexisting diplomatic equal. But as we shall see, in either case, there is an observable tendency to decentralise northern China based regimes in Liao discourse.

An inscription written in 970 for a Liao military governor, Geng Chongmei 耿崇美, denotes northern China by terms containing "centre," while referring to Liao as a "Superior State" (*shangguo* 上國).<sup>97</sup> The inscription praises the Geng's bilinguality, saying that "Because the language of the Superior State was different from that of *Zhonghua* and that Mr. Geng was good at translation...the Great Sage Emperor said he was glad to have employed a talent."<sup>98</sup> The inscription also mentions the Liao military assistance of Shi Jingtang in 936, which, as the text claims, contributed to Liao's reputation and its leading role in the contemporary interstate system: "As the new ruler of the entire Yan region, the emperor went northward to the Superior State [after assisting Shi Jingtang to seize the throne]. Since then [peoples from] all directions paid tribute [to Liao], and the *Zhongxia* came to pay their submissions."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> "Geng Chongmei muzhi" 耿崇美墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Geng Chongmei], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 13-16, p. 13.

<sup>98</sup> "Geng Chongmei muzhi," p. 13. 公善於轉譯...大聖皇帝自謂得人。

<sup>99</sup> "Geng Chongmei muzhi," p. 13. 自此萬方入貢，中夏來朝。

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In the above passages, Xia, attested to by archaeological findings from the Shang dynasty, was the name of the first Sinic dynasty which preceded Shang in Sinitic historiography, a term which acquired auspicious connotations such as elegance and magnificence. The earliest appearance of Hua is found in the Zhou dynasty, and has normally been interpreted to have meant flower and illustriousness. Xia, Hua, and other relevant expressions such as, in the above cited passages, *Zhongxia* (Central Xia) and *Zhonghua* (Central Hua) became alternative names for the Central Kingdom/Plains of northern China, or in broader sense, depending on the context, the entire perceived Sinic realm. The tomb inscription does not employ centre or central to denote Liao but refers to the northern China regimes as *Zhongxia* or *Zhonghua* which in pre-existing Sinic tradition implied the cosmic centre. However, these expressions, with their evident Sinocentric implications were not employed in favour of the northern China regimes.

The above tomb inscription calls Liao as the Superior State, and thus plainly holds a Liao-centric stance. In Sinitic materials the expression of Superior State generally indicated northern China based regimes. For instance, in 940, the Southern Tang court based in present-day Nanjing sent a letter to Later Jin of northern China, which reads that “Our state is sending a letter to the Emperor of the Superior State,”<sup>100</sup> with the Superior State referring to Later Jin. The records of the Song source *CFYG* also treat southern China regimes as Inferior States (*xiaguo* 下国) in relation to their northern counterparts.<sup>101</sup> Even within a unified empire, “southerners” were also considered inferior to the “northerners” in the Central

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<sup>100</sup> *JWDS*, 7:79.2443.

<sup>101</sup> *CFYG*, 3:182.2017.

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Kingdom, and seen as people from inferior regions.<sup>102</sup> In Sinitic historiography, the Superior State was normally associated with northern China, and regimes based there. But in the tomb inscription the Superior State was clearly not in reference to any based in northern China but refers to Liao in the north.

The inscription also presents an interstate hierarchy centred on Liao. As it claims, peoples from myriad directions came to pay tribute to Liao, and *Zhongxia*, which in Sinitic materials normally referred to the cosmic centre, had paid submission to the Liao court. The centre and margins as depicted in pre-existing Sinitic tradition was thus reversed. According to the inscription, in 936 it was a *Zhongxia* regime Later Jin that became the vassal state of Liao. And it is difficult to believe that the Liao elite would recognise a subordinate state as representative of the cosmic centre. Therefore it is interesting to see that while in the inscription the text uses *Zhonghua* and *Zhongxia* which normally bore Sinocentric implications, in practice it decentralises the old centre in northern China to emphasise the superiority of Liao to the north and portray Liao as the new centre of universe. The expressions of *Zhonghua* and *Zhongxia* are thus better described as the remains of conventional nomenclatures of northern China regimes than indicators of their centrality in the cosmos.

In the tomb inscription written for Liu Jiwen discussed in Chapter II, we find similar ideas denoting Liao as a superior power. As mentioned, in a discussion of the conflict between Liao

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<sup>102</sup> Cheng Minsheng 程民生, *Songdai diyu wenhua* 宋代地域文化 [Regional Cultures of Song] (Kaifeng: Henan sheng Xinhua shudian, 1997), pp. 46-53.



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and Later Han on the one side and Later Zhou and Northern Song on the other, both the Later Zhou and Northern Song emperors were treated in the inscription as illegitimate imperial claimants. The Later Han emperor, although recognised as a legal emperor, was denied eligibility to receive the Mandate of Heaven. Instead, Liao was the only “Celestial Dynasty” and the “Superior State,” to which the Northern Han emperors paid political allegiance. The contrast between Liao as a celestial regime and northern China regimes as either usurpers or emperors devoid of heavenly blessing, highlights the legitimate status of Liao emperors as the only recipients of the Mandate of Heaven, supreme imperial holders, and the embodiment of the cosmic centre.

It is in fact very common in the tomb inscriptions to find an emphasis on Liao as the holder of the Mandate of Heaven. For instance, a tomb inscription written in 1008 for Yelü Yuanning 耶律元寧 of the Liao imperial clan reads that, “In the beginning, it was heaven that created our state, installing two surnames [as the ruling clans], which are Yelü and Xiao....The Yelü clan has the essence of the imperial monarchs, in accordance with the predictions of Charts and demonstrating the magnificence of the north. [They] build up the nobility of facing the south, becoming the imperial clan.”<sup>103</sup> “In accordance with the Charts” is a classical trope, which described one’s possession of the Mandate of Heaven was demonstrable by auspicious omens. “Facing the south” was another classical trope from *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes), which was frequently employed in imperial edicts of later eras to symbolise the imperial position which was supposed to be positioned in the north and facing the direction of south –

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<sup>103</sup> “Yelü Yuanning muzhi” 耶律元寧墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Yelü Yuanning], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 43-46, p. 43.

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where the sun shines upon thus symbolising the brightness.<sup>104</sup> Through combining the classical tropes and the perceived “northern” direction where Liao was located, the passage in fact emphasises the legitimacy and superiority of Liao and their ruling clans.

A 1015 inscription for another Yel ü Yuanning 耶律元寧, also an imperial clan member, reads that “The North gets the Mandate and the *Zhongxia* fears; age after age [the imperial lineage] has the virtuous and the heroic, and for generations [they produced] the wise and the brave.”<sup>105</sup> These passages do not specify the event(s) in question, but seems to simply express that the rise of Liao in the north was a heaven-determined destiny, by which the *Zhongxia* regimes were awestruck. Liao was treated in this context as a northern regime, but the reception of the Mandate of Heaven and the image of *Zhongxia* as inferior implies that Liao was the legitimate cosmic centre.

Besides the tomb inscriptions, other evidence extolling the Liao acquisition of the Mandate of Heaven and Liao as the cosmic centre comes from publicly displayed stelae. For instance, one epitaph on a stele in a Buddhist Temple says that: “Our hard iron-like Liao got the Mandate of Heaven, and thus possessed the *Zhongtu* 中土 (Central Earth).”<sup>106</sup> This passage

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<sup>104</sup> Li Shen 李申 and Lu Guangming 盧光明 (eds.), *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義 [Orthodox Commentaries on the *Book of Changes*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), p. 327.

<sup>105</sup> “Yelü Yuanning muzhi” 耶律元寧墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Yel ü Yuanning], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 58-59, p. 58. 朔方佐運，中夏畏服。代有賢豪，世傳智勇。

<sup>106</sup> “Jingzhou Chengongshan Guanji si beiming” 景州陳宮山觀雞寺碑銘 [The Stele Inscription for the Guanji Temple at Chengong Mountain in Jingzhou] in *Liaodai shike wenbian*, pp. 452-54, p. 454. 我鉅遼啓運，奄有中土。

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referred to the three-month occupation of Later Jin after the Liao-Jin four-year war between 944 and 947. The defeat of Later Jin armies and the occupation of the “Central Earth” (north China) were interpreted to be a result of having acquired the Mandate of Heaven. Again, although the interpretation follows the convention of describing northern China as the “centre,” it nevertheless emphasises Liao as the state favoured by the Mandate. On another Buddhist temple stele, the epitaph of which memorialises a Buddhist Master Xianyan, the text praises the great teachings of Xianyan, and says that “Koryō is a foreign country, and Sengtong<sup>107</sup> admires [Xianyan’s teachings]; [Our] Great Liao was the Central Kingdom, and our Buddhist masters and their disciples longed [for his teachings]. Therefore, our Daozong [Emperor], who is the most outstanding among sages, often summoned him (Xianyan) to the court during summers and winters...”<sup>108</sup> As we can see, although the epitaph is that of a Buddhist figure and his followers, the cosmic structure discourse is not based on the Buddhist worldview whereby India was the centre of the universe. It treats the Koryō state as a foreign country, as all pre-Liao Sinitic historical writings did, but it saw the Liao state rather than the northern China regimes as the Central Kingdom (*Zhongguo* 中國). The above two examples also illustrate that in the discourse of Liao religious orders, the old cosmic centre of northern China had been decentralised with Liao regarded as the new one.

From above evidence of the pre-1005 conflict and negotiations between Liao and northern

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<sup>107</sup> Sengtong seems to have denoted a Koryō prince at the time who had joined the Buddhist order. See “Xianyan dashi mubei” 鮮演大師墓碑 [The Tombstone for the Xianyan Master], in *Liaodai shike wenbian*, pp. 667-69, p. 669, note 8.

<sup>108</sup> “Xianyan dashi mubei,” p. 668. 高麗外邦，僧統傾心；大遼中國，師徒翹首。故我道宗，聖人之極也，常以冬夏，召赴庭闕。

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China regimes, and between Liao and its vassal states such as Koryŏ, Later Jin and Northern Han, we find that the expressions concerning Liao and their neighbours' place within the cosmos seem to be controversial. On the one hand, these interpretations retained terminology which still treats northern China regimes as in a "central" place. On the other hand, at least based on extant materials, with no exceptions, the Liao elite emphasised Liao as the cosmic centre and superior state in the contemporary interstate hierarchy, which invested vassal emperors, withstood "false" imperial claimants' invasions, and was recipient of the Mandate of Heaven. Liao was depicted as at the centre of the contemporary multistate system and the leading power of their world order, receiving tributes and submissions from surrounding peoples including those of what was conventionally known as the Central Kingdom in Sinitic. As we can see, regimes in the Central Plains were portrayed as either subordinates of Liao or usurpers/false claimants to the throne without heaven-granted rulership.

It is apparent that there are two centres appearing in the same context – the old centre of northern China and the new cosmic centre of Liao. As discussed, this new cosmic centre was constructed via borrowing discourses from the Sinitic classics, and was thus based on the acceptance of the existence of the old centre. Therefore it is not surprising to see that the interpretations involving both northern China and Liao sometimes seem mismatched, and create confusion about which was the real cosmic centre for the Liao elite. However, I suggest that these terms containing "centre" or "central" were primarily "remains" of Sinitic historiographical naming conventions for northern China regimes. In other words, although sometimes the northern China regimes were denoted by "centre" following such conventions,

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the emphasis was never their superiority and central status in the universe, since the emphasis was always that Liao possessed central place in the cosmos. Before the Liao dynasty there had been a very long tradition in Sinitic historiography of referring to northern China and the regimes based there as the Central Kingdom. It is understandable that the Liao elite who were trained in Sinitic were unable to cease use of such terms immediately. The power of this tradition was strong, and the retaining it in Liao domestic writings does suggest the difficulty of constructing a new centre completely devoid of the influence of the old discourse.

However, the Liao identity as the cosmic centre that was newly taking shape according to Liao materials also demonstrate the endeavour of challenging the old Sinocentric and north China-centric discourse, and mirrored a negotiation between the Liao northern identity and its cosmic centrality.

Another major reason why in my view the references to northern China as a centre were simply conventional relics rather than ideas the Liao elite really wanted to express is that the use of such terminology was undergoing evolution and there was no consensus of how northern China should be called among the Liao elite. In other words, for the Liao elite, “centre” terms were merely one of the many choices to denote northern China. Thus these terms were simply used as alternative place and regime names of northern China rather than expressions of its perceived central place within the cosmos. We have much evidence in which northern China regimes are simply treated as a “southern” realm, not the centre.

*Nanxia*, or Southern Xia, was one of many other ways of interpreting northern China and the Liao neighbours based there. For example, a tomb inscription for Han Kuangsi written in 985

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records that “The Yan region was where the capital of [our] imperial dynasty was located. [This place] was the centre of the Nine Submissions and ruled all the vassals, garrisoned with ten thousand armies and subdued the Southern Xia.”<sup>109</sup> As we can see, what in some other inscriptions is called *Zhongxia* is in this one simply referred to as *Nanxia* – Southern Xia, or Xia to the South. Northern China was not addressed as something possessing a central position but simply an area south of Liao.

This piece of information also specified the perceived real location of the centre of the world. As mentioned in the first section, the Nine Submissions was a classical framework of the world structure. The Southern Capital of Liao, located in the Yan region was in the small northern fringe of Central Plain which has long been considered a barrier defending the Sinic realm from nomadic invasions. In Sinic historiography it was an important but marginal area. However, in this inscription it was interpreted, according to the model of the Nine Submissions, as the centre of the world that subdued all vassal states. Although the passage mentions nothing about the steppe regions of Liao, it clearly decentres the Central Plain in favour of its northern fringe, considering the Liao state as possessing the cosmic centre and through its mighty military force subduing northern China, an area which simply appears as being located to the south of Liao.

The above case is one example showing the diversity of modes the Liao elite had adopted to

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<sup>109</sup> “Han Kuangsi muzhi” 韓匡嗣墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Han Kuangsi], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 23-27, p. 24. 雄燕之地，皇朝所都，宗九服而表則諸侯，屯萬旅而控制南夏。

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interpret the Liao centrality. Besides the connection between Liao and the Pole Star, we see that in this example the interpretation shifts the cosmic centre from northern China to Liao based on the mode of the Nine Submissions. To treat the Liao Southern Capital and surrounding areas as the new cosmic and spatial centre in place of the old one on the Central Plains mirrors the increasing importance of the small northern part of the Central Kingdom in the Liao discourse. Incorporated into Liao and thus geopolitically independent from the northern China regimes, and as the most populous sectary of the Liao Empire, within Liao discourse the Yan region had been freed from its previously inferior and peripheral status long ascribed to it by the pre-Liao Sinic discourse.

The 1015 inscription for Yelü Yuanning carries some similar expressions. Besides the aforementioned information about the Liao imperial enterprise established in the north, Liao monarchs' possession of the Mandate, and the Liao dominance in the interstate relationships, it reads that "the Southern Xia challenged [our authority] therefore the imperial dynasty launched armies [to punish it],"<sup>110</sup> which referred to Shi Chonggui's resistance to the Liao dominance in 943 and the ensuing four-year war between the two regimes. The inscription then recounts Northern Song's invasion of the Liao territory: "Then the false claimant Song, without awareness for their incompetence, launched illegal wars against our frontiers and violated our capital...[Yelü Yuanning] established his great fame of defeating the Song, and successfully protected the whole Yan region."<sup>111</sup> The inscription interprets Liao as the only

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<sup>110</sup> "Yelü Yuanning muzhi," p. 43. 南夏作梗，皇朝出師。

<sup>111</sup> "Yelü Yuanning muzhi," p. 43. 偽宋無名之師，擾我邊控。

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legitimate imperial power and the Song emperor – Taizong – as a “false claimant,” and censures Song for its violation of Liao borders as well as for the Liao-Song war. As we can observe in this inscription, northern China and Shi Chonggui’s Later Jin are again referred to as “Southern Xia” rather than a regime possessing a “central” place.

To sum up the above discussion, the regimes based in northern China, although conventionally denoted as the Central Kingdoms in some cases, were unlikely to represent any centre in Liao discourse. They were either vassal states of Liao or depicted as illegitimate imperial powers. The old centre was denoted diversely and there was no unanimously accepted nomenclature. In extant materials, besides *Zhongxia*, *Zhongtu*, and *Nanxia*, other terms such as *Huanzhong* 寰中 (Middle of the Universe),<sup>112</sup> or *Zhuxia* 諸夏 (all Xia),<sup>113</sup> and *Quxia* 區夏 (Regions of Xia)<sup>114</sup> were also employed. Liao elite also used derogatory terms or specific names such as *Shi Jin* 石晉 (the Jin state of the Shi family),<sup>115</sup> *Si Jin* 嗣晉 (the successive Jin ruler),<sup>116</sup> *Wei Song* 僞宋 (the false claimant of Song), *Bian Song* 汴宋

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<sup>112</sup> “Xiaoshi furen muzhi” 蕭氏夫人墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Lady Xiao], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 47-49, p. 47.

<sup>113</sup> “Shengzong huangdi aice” 聖宗皇帝哀冊 [Eulogy of the Shengzong Emperor], in *Liaodai shike wenbian*, pp. 193-95, p. 194.

<sup>114</sup> “Qin Jinguo da zhanggongzhu muzhi” 秦晉國大長公主墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for the Grand Senior Princess of the Qin Jin Princedom], in *Liaodai shike wenbian*, pp. 248-52, p. 248.

<sup>115</sup> “Geng Yanyi muzhi” 耿延毅墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Geng Yanyi], in *Liaodai shike wenbian*, pp. 159-64, p. 159.

<sup>116</sup> “Xu Congyun ji qi Kangshi muzhi” 許從贊暨妻康氏墓誌 [The Tomb Inscriptions of Xu Congyun and His Wife Lady Kang], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 19-21, p. 19; “Yelü Cong shendao bei” 耶律琮神道碑 [The Spirit-road Stele of Yelü Cong], pp. 340-44, p. 341.



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(the Song state with Bian as capital),<sup>117</sup> or simply *Zhao Song shi* 趙宋氏 (the Zhao house of Song)<sup>118</sup> to refer to Liao southern neighbours. In addition, in materials which employed centre to denote northern China, this did not indicate the centrality or legitimacy of northern China regimes because they were employed in a context where the central theme was always to underscore the supremacy of Liao. Liao, as the Superior State and Celestial Dynasty, was the only state whose monarchs were perceived by the Liao elite to have received the Mandate of Heaven. As we can see, the “central” terms were therefore merely an alternative way to refer to northern China and the regimes based there, indicating the remains of Sinic historiographical conventions rather than an established consensus or ideology that they represented the real cosmic centre. They display a kind of “inertia” of tradition when addressing northern China in Liao Sinitic writings by Liao elite trained in Sinitic and Sinitic historiography, but these terms had already lost their function of indicating the centrality of northern China. The old centre of northern China in the Liao discourse was now considered peripheral to the newly rising cosmic centre – Liao.

#### **4. The four cardinal directions in the Liao ideology**

Different from the Sinic concept of “Five Cardinal Directions” and the Mongolian ideology of “Peoples of Five Colours,”<sup>119</sup> in Liao cosmic discourse it seems that the world primarily consisted of four cardinal directions. According to extant materials, the Liao elite generally

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<sup>117</sup> “Shengzong huangdi aice,” p. 194.

<sup>118</sup> “Geng Yanyi muzhi,” p. 160.

<sup>119</sup> Please see the footnote 55 in this chapter.

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assigned the cardinal directions of east, south, west and north to the four major powers of the Eastern Eurasian continent – Koryŏ, Song, Xi Xia, and Liao.<sup>120</sup> As observed in the diplomatic documents sent from the Liao court to their neighbours and from Liao tomb inscriptions or stelae above ground, the Koryŏ state was regarded as an eastern state, Song was interpreted as either a southern or central regime, and to the west were the Tangut power in the tenth century and the Xi Xia state in the eleventh. The Liao state, as discussed, possessed either a central or northern place within the cosmos. For instance, in the 1035 diplomatic letter sent to Koryŏ, Liao refers to Koryŏ as Eastern Sea, the Tangut as Western Land, Song as Southern Xia, and the Pole Star (the North Pole, *beiji*) to indicate Liao itself.

Another interesting example is the mourning inscription written for Liao's Shengzong Emperor in 1031, which has a passage reading that: "To the east we demonstrated our military might and therefore the Chen and Bian (i.e. Koryŏ) paid tributes. To the west, we spread our civilisation...and thus the Qiang people of the (Xi) Xia state come to report their duty...Only the Central Earth broke the [peace] oath. [They] drove [their] evil forces from Song which was based at Bian (Song capital), taking the Bing and Fen (prefectures of Northern Han) and invaded our imperial capital."<sup>121</sup> Chen and Bian in the text refer to two of the three kingdoms in the history of Korean peninsula. Here they are a metaphor for the contemporary state of Koryŏ to the east of Liao. The Xi Xia state, as one of the western

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<sup>120</sup> Mori has a similar observation, "Jūichi seiki kōhan nio keru HokuSō no kokusaiteki chii ni tsuite," pp. 289-95.

<sup>121</sup> "Shengzong huangdi aice," p. 194. 東振兵威，辰卞以之納款；西被聲教，瓜沙繇是貢珍...惟彼中土，曩歲渝盟。自汴宋而親驅虵豕，取并汾而來犯京師。

powers, was perceived to be under the influence of the Liao civilisation and came to pay their allegiance. The northern China regime Northern Song appeared with a dual-faceted image. On the one hand, it is a regime in the Central Earth, on the other interpreted as an evil force devoid of faithfulness and righteousness. More importantly, the emphasis of the inscription, which was devoted to the deceased Liao Emperor Shengzong, was never the central position of their Song neighbour, but the superiority of Liao in the interstate system and thus its centrality in the cosmos. As the inscription continues, the Song side eventually “pleaded for continuation of friendship and begged to conclude [a treaty] through sacrifices; [they] paid their tributes of gold and silk to assist the repair of [our] weapons and shields.”<sup>122</sup> It had been the Liao forces and the emperor who had “saved the Sinic peoples from disasters”<sup>123</sup> and “defeated the powerful and conquered the hegemon.”<sup>124</sup> When the emperor died, “the heaven released bad omens and the Four Seas moaned,”<sup>125</sup> and “when the burial date drew near the Song court felt sorrow, ordering their heads of the Six Ministries to come to mourn and preparing hundreds of offerings to express condolences.”<sup>126</sup> And of course Song was not the only state to visit at this time: “All the vassal lords came and peoples from the myriad directions gathered. The amount of wine offered was like the water in the Mian River, and all missed the benevolent monarch with unstoppable tears.”<sup>127</sup> In this depiction, Liao draws the attention and veneration of peoples from all directions, including Song of the Central Earth.

<sup>122</sup> “Shengzong huangdi aice,” p.194. 懇求繼好，乞效刑牲。貢奉金帛，助贍甲兵。

<sup>123</sup> “Shengzong huangdi aice,” p.194. 解諸夏之倒懸。

<sup>124</sup> “Shengzong huangdi aice,” p.194. 取威定霸。

<sup>125</sup> “Shengzong huangdi aice,” p.195. 九霄降禍，四海纏哀。

<sup>126</sup> “Shengzong huangdi aice,” p.195. 虞殯將期，宋朝感義。命六使以臨喪，備百物而來祭。

<sup>127</sup> “Shengzong huangdi aice,” p.195. 諸侯畢至，群方咸暨。祭旨酒以如澠，思仁君而流涕。

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The classical tropes, such as “vassal lords,” the “myriad directions,” and the Four Seas which in Sinitic historiography all denoted the world surrounding the Central Kingdom and the true imperial sovereign, were employed here to underscore the central place possessed by Liao in the universe. As discussed, interpretations like this one seem to have demonstrated a tension between the convention of referring to the northern China regimes as the centre and efforts to construct the Liao state and its imperial power as the new cosmic centre.

Another example is the Liao tomb inscription written in 1078 for Qin Dechang 秦德昌. There, for the three neighbours of Liao the text employs the terms Eastern Han (Koryō) 東韓, Southern Song 南宋 and 西夏 Western (Xi) Xia. Through citing a conversation between Qin Dechang and the Xi Xia ruler, the inscription records that Qin Dechang referred to Liao as the Superior State.<sup>128</sup> The inscription again presents a world consisting of four major powers with three of them clearly assigned with correspondent directions. For Liao no explicit directional indicator is given, but the two major cardinal directions the inscription do not mention are the centre and north. Thus the Liao state in this context could either be a northern state or, as observed from the expression of “Superior State,” a central one, or both.

A Buddhist temple stele inscribed in 1081 does not explicitly declare Liao supremacy above all others. It states: “Eastern Han and Western [Xi] Xia 東韓西夏 offered us tributes of native products and paid their allegiance; Southern Song and Northern Liao 南宋北遼

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<sup>128</sup> “Qin Dechang muzhi” 秦德昌墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Qin Dechang], in *Liaodai shike wen xubian*, pp. 166-68, p. 167.

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exchanged [their] envoys and continued their good relationship.”<sup>129</sup> The narrative does not highlight the superiority and centrality of Liao, but is a good description of eleventh century interstate relations involving Liao. Both Koryŏ and Xi Xia are depicted as vassals of Liao, while Liao and Song appear as equals.

The above records concerning Liao and its neighbours and their corresponding cardinal directions show the multi-faceted identities of Liao. Texts were circulated in different contexts or written according to distinct authorial agendas. There is no singular narrative through which to understand Liao spatial/cosmic identities. What is also clear is the popularity of assigning four cardinal directions to the four major powers of the Liao contemporary interstate system, although sometimes one power (either Liao or Song) might appear representing two directions.

I propose that in the Liao discourse the constant appearance of four, rather than five, cardinal directions largely resulted from political and social changes starting from the 840s outlined in the Introduction, and was related to the Liao contemporary interstate system and the Liao elite’s perception of the cosmic/world structure at the time. In the Sinic and later the Mongolian versions of the cosmos, it is common to find the idea of “peoples” of different directions, defined by imagined differences of appearances or cultures. But the Liao designations of the four cardinal directions are usually reserved for four real “states” in

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<sup>129</sup> “Yifengxian Woruyuan beiji” 義豐縣臥如院碑記 [The Stele Inscription for Woru Monastery in Yifeng County], in *Liaodai shike wenbian*, pp. 395-96, p. 395. 東韓西夏，貢土產而輸誠；南宋北遼，交星輶而繼好。

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realistic and political sense. As discussed, the cardinal directions are a relational concept, and each direction does not exist on its own but justifies and is justified by the very existence of other directions. During the tenth and eleventh centuries the Liao identity as a northern, rather than western or eastern, dynasty in my view indicates that the Liao spatial location ideology was framed primarily via a north-south relationship. In other words, it was largely the interactions of Liao with its southern neighbours that helped to shape the prescription that Liao was a “northern” state. The Five Dynasties and Song, which provided the most formidable contenders to Liao, played an indispensable role in defining the Liao elite’s understanding of their own position within the cosmos. While throughout most of the tenth century the “south” was a major power against which Liao largely defined its own existence and identity, during the course of the late tenth and the eleventh centuries, Koryŏ and Xi Xia also became important regional forces that could not be ignored by the Liao court. In Liao diplomacy, they were the key to maintaining the geopolitical power-balance with Song on the Eastern Eurasian continent.

This Liao cosmology mirrored a world which was primarily justified by inherited Tang legacies. Born out of an era characterised by the collapse of the Uighur Empire and the subsequent “dark age” on the steppe, the Liao cosmic structure of the four directions was made up of four states whose institutions were largely modelled on Tang. Powers were not defined by “peoples,” and the cosmos consisting of cardinal directions did not represent “peoples” anymore. Instead, it was a universe in which institutionalised “states” defined by Tang culture were the dominant norm and were associated with cardinal directions. This

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world structure did not reflect a distinction between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” nomads, but bore the marks of the political and cultural characteristics of the particular era in which Liao existed.

But this does not mean there were no powers to the north of Liao. Records show that Liao fought or subjugated tribal groups from its north or northwest, who sometimes caused trouble in Liao frontier regions.<sup>130</sup> From the Liao’s perspective these nomadic tribal forces were indeed in a northerly direction. For instance, a tomb inscription written in 1072 for Yel ü Renxian 耶律仁先 mentions that the tomb owner had in 1063 placated the tribes of “Dada (Tartar) in/to the north” 北部韃靼. But the Liao records of these northern forces were never included in an organised cosmic framework of cardinal directions, neither were they given a status as important as Song, Xi Xia and Koryŏ. They were not perceived as “civilised” powers within the same “cultural context” of Liao, Song, Koryŏ and Xi Xia. Liao and its three major neighbours had well-organised institutions largely inherited from their common predecessor – the Tang Empire, and well-conducted diplomacy based on shared etiquette and featured by regular emissaries, which were further derived from historical precedents long practised between major Eastern Eurasian regimes with Sinitic as their written form of *lingua franca*.

In contrast, there was an absence of a “northern” power for Liao following the collapse of the Uighur Empire in the 840s and the “north” was not a real threat, rarely offering strong

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<sup>130</sup> See for instance, “Yelü Renxian muzhi” 耶律仁先墓誌 [The Tomb Inscription for Yel ü Renxian], in *Liaodai shike wenbian*, pp. 352-57, p. 354.

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enemies. No great powers could seriously challenge the Liao authority from the north or northwest of the steppe region and thus no specific cardinal direction was warranted in the Liao cosmological framework. The “northern” identity was preserved for the Liao state only, although Liao contemporary records show they were aware that north of Liao were some lesser tribal powers. In short, besides Liao itself, the cosmic structure which defined the Liao cosmology lacked a northern force. It is thus understandable to see that in the Liao discourse there were usually four cardinal directions, in which the north and centre sometimes overlapped as the same regime – Liao itself.



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## Chapter V Conclusion

Although far from reaching unanimous agreement on what is an ethnic group, scholars nevertheless tend to see several elements, especially constructed origins, languages, cultural customs or religious beliefs, as key factors defining ethnicity. From our present perspective, when differences have occurred in the above elements of a human group, it may have well been seen as indicators of changes of their ethnic identity. However, for historians a question that has not been seriously asked is whether these changes would have meant “ethnic” for our subjects of study. We have in history and the present so many examples in which individuals had/have changed their languages, cultural habits or perceived ancestry, but retained their original ethnic identification, which means the elements used by scholars to define ethnic identity were/are not considered in the same way by the individuals in question.

“Identity” is by no means an ethnic issue only. It is multi-faceted and can be relevant to class, profession, party, etc. A certain language, or a constructed ancestry, may be taken by individuals as a marker primarily of social status without ascribing it with ethnic implications. However, most scholarly works on Eastern Eurasian history have rarely questioned the effectiveness of the concept of ethnicity as the dominant analytical framework for topics involving the so-called non-Han/Chinese regimes, such as Liao, Jin, Yuan and Qing dynasties. Interactions that happened between the Han/Chinese and non-Han/Chinese components and people of such regimes have normally been assumed to be ethnic issues without much discussion of other possibilities.

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To understand the issue of identity often means to understand the context within which it was shaped. While the subject of this study, Liao, has normally been discussed in ethnic terms by scholars as a regime ruled by one of China's historical ethnic minorities, an alien conquest dynasty, or an Inner Asian regime, it emerged in fact from a world that did not always prioritise ethnic thinking. The collapse of the Uighur Qaghanate and the shaping of a multistate system after the fall of Tang led to the increasing popularity of Tang political and cultural legacies in Kitan and then Liao society. Origin myths shaped around the sage monarchs such as Huangdi and Han imperial rulers; cultural elements such as the imperial designations originated from Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang dynasties; classical discourses concerning the "Central Kingdom," as well as the Sinitic script used for writing a large proportion of Liao materials; all found their way in the Liao elite culture during the course of the dynasty from the tenth to the early twelfth century. These elements became regalia that marked the distinguished status and universal reputation of the Liao elite stratum within the contemporary multistate Eastern Eurasia, and were not ethnically perceived as cultural symbols belonging exclusively to the Han/Chinese.

On the one hand, running counter to the assumed divide between China and the Inner Asian world, the Liao ruling elite not only adopted many cultural legacies and elements with Sinic origins, but also treated them as internal and indispensable to Kitan and Liao society. The non-Han/Chinese elite of Liao never rejected cultures from outside the Kitan/Liao native world, and were not worried about constructing the introduced "foreign" elements as things

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native to their own life, history, and culture. On the other, the Liao elite imbued these common legacies with steppe and Kitan native elements or new connotations. They were not, as historians who favour theories of sinicisation have assumed, concerned with acquiring an identity indistinguishable from the Han, rather they sought to construct a prestigious Liao identity distinct from other elite identities, and justifying the legitimacy and the very existence of the Liao state and its ruling elite within a multi-state Eastern Eurasia.

The Liao monarchs, like many Kitan rulers of pre-imperial era, had assumed the mantle of qaghan. This title and position are absent in Sinitic historiography concerning the Liao imperial history but mostly recorded in the Kitan materials. For nomads under the Liao authority, the position of qaghan held by the Liao monarchs was a mark of their nomadic origins and resonated with their continued practice of steppe customs. It was a sign of the distinguished position they had possessed within the Liao tribal hierarchy.

However, within the Liao political hierarchy, the Liao monarchs were not merely qaghans, but were also emperors. Some historians prefer to emphasize the multiple facets of the non-Han rulership, and normally assume that Liao rulers appeared as emperors for the Han/Chinese subjects but qaghans for their Inner Asian steppe audiences. However, the sources written in Kitan reveal to us that the Liao monarchs were emperors not only for their Han subjects, but *also* for steppe nomads. The Sinitic term of emperor – *huangdi* – had been introduced into Kitan scripts and society since Abaoji's time, but it was not a translation of the Kitan term of qaghan – the terms emperor and qaghan while referring to the same figure

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represented two different roles in the Kitan language, cultural, and political context.

Although the term qaghan was a royal designation inherited from Turkic tradition it does not seem to have been distinguished enough for the Liao monarchs. Following the Turkic steppe traditions, qaghan in the Liao period was a divisible political position. Like the situation of Turkic qaghanates centuries ago, in which there had been “supreme” and “subordinate” qaghans, the Liao monarchs were not the only ones who could be called qaghan. Foreign monarchs, such as the Song rulers, appeared as either emperor or qaghan in the Kitan language materials. Even within the Liao realm, there had been more than one acknowledged as qaghans.

So what then distinguished the Liao qaghans from other lesser qaghans within the Liao state? The position of emperor. Within the Liao internal political hierarchy, the Liao monarchs were the only qaghans eligible to concurrently hold the position of emperor. That meant, the Liao emperor was the supreme qaghan, indicating the most prestigious and powerful rulers of all the nomads. The position of emperor in the Liao context was not one employed in ethnic sense - it was not performed exclusively for the sake of the Liao Han subjects – it also played an important role in the Liao tribal organisation and nomadic political hierarchy, as evidenced by the presence of the term in Kitan script writings.

With the establishment of Liao imperial culture, the perceptions of emperorship, and more generally, imperial sovereignty with Sinic origins, also experienced significant changes.

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Although the Liao emperors possessed incomparable superiority within the Liao realm, imperial sovereignty, expressed by imperial designations such as the positions of emperor and Son of Heaven, reign era-names, temple names, posthumous names, etc., could be held simultaneously by many monarchs of foreign states. Liao and many neighbouring monarchs recognised each other's claims of imperial authority, contributing to the formation of a new interstate order consisting of mutually acknowledged emperors. Only the concept of the Son of Heaven and the Mandate of Heaven, despite their perceived divisibility in early Liao history of the tenth century, seemed to become indivisible since the eleventh century onwards.

This new perception of the imperial sovereignty with Sinic origins seems to have been derived from an earlier steppe tradition of the divisible qaghanship, mirroring the influences of Turkic cultures on the Sinic ones in the Liao historical context. With the downfall of Uighur power and the subsequent power vacuum in the steppe and the formation of a multistate system that drew upon features of Tang and early Sinic cultural legacies since the early tenth century, the Liao elite which emerged from that context viewed what historians may term Han cultural elements as in fact universal to the elite of the contemporary world. The wholesale adoption of imperial cultures with Sinic origins by the Liao and the new perception of their divisibility rather than incomparability thus mirrored interactions of steppe and Sinic traditions and their impact on the Liao imperial culture, which are difficult to be explained by the concept of ethnic identity.

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A constructed common ancestry in modern scholarship is also a key if not, for some scholars even, the most decisive element in defining an ethnic group. And for scholars if individuals construct an ancestry different from their original ones it always means a change in ethnic identity. However, common ancestry in history should by no means only be justified by ethnic terms or discussed in ethnic discourse. A perceived common ancestor was not always a mark that brought together individuals who considered themselves belonging to a single ethnic group, but in many cases a sign of social status rather than ethnic identity.

This can be seen in the Liao Sinitic materials, where at least after the middle of the tenth century both the imperial and consort clan members had tomb inscriptions tracing their history to the remote antiquity. Members of the imperial clan had constructed for themselves a home of origin at Qishui, from where the ancestors of Zhou and Han dynasties arose. In the eleventh century, we have clear contemporary evidence dating the Liao emperors to the Han royal house of Liu, and further, to the remotest mythical ancestor of the Han dynasty – Huangdi. The clan of consorts to the Yelü imperial house also constructed for themselves a comparable origin with a distant past and great reputation, the remotest ancestor of which was Huangdi as well. In Liao Sinitic materials, the home of origin at Lanling located in north China and the Sinitic surname of Xiao adopted by the consort clan members conveyed their efforts to connect themselves to one of the most eminent families in history. The members of the Lanling Xiao family of Liao were presented in tomb inscriptions, as having received their surname during the Spring and Autumn Period more than a thousand years prior to the Liao dynasty. Not only the eminent prime ministers of the Han dynasty, such as Xiao He, but also

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those at the centre of Tang Empire's politics, came from this great lineage.

A key discrepancy between Sinitic and Kitan materials in the recording of the Liao ruling clans' family history is the way of writing their surnames. In Sinitic materials, since the middle of the tenth century the consort clan members, regardless of their tribal origins, had collectively been recorded with the surname of Xiao. But in Kitan sources, throughout the Liao dynasty they continued to identify their origins by tribal names. For the imperial Yel ü clan, although contemporary and later sources interpreted Yel ü as equivalent to a Kitan translation of Liu of the Han royal house, the Kitan language materials nevertheless seemed never to have included such interpretations.

But this discrepancy does not change the fact that the two Liao ruling clans had constructed for themselves "foreign" origins. In their tomb inscriptions written in Kitan, the imperial and consort members continued to identify themselves as having originated from a land outside Liao - Qishui and Lanling in north China. Inscribed on tomb stones with Sinitic or Kitan and buried underground, the constructed distant and prestigious origins of the Liao imperial and consort clans from Huangdi were an integral part to their own family history, rather than something primarily demonstrable and aimed to please their Han supporters.

The Liao adoption of ancestries that originated from Huangdi seems to have indicated the "sinicisation" of the two Liao ruling clans and their identification with the Han, as a common origin has always been interpreted as a core of an ethnic group in most modern scholarship.

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But throughout the Liao dynasty the Yel ü and Xiao families continued to maintain ethnic boundaries and impose the Han-Kitan binary upon political and cultural institutions. This working binary, however, was never in conflict with the Liao adoption of a Huangdi origin. The Liao ruling clans did not regard the sharing of common ancestry with their Han subjects as something undermining their native identity, because this origin for them was never a marker of a “Han/Chinese” ethnic group but indicated historical depth and prestige and a sign of elite status universally.

Like many other elements such as the Sinitic script and imperial designations with Sinic origins, in Eastern Eurasian history the ancestry from the remote sage kings and emperors had long been universal legacies shared by the ruling families of many later dynasties with diverse ethnic origins. Huangdi and his descendants – the royal house of the Han dynasty and the Lanling Xiao family – were figures of antiquity with great reputations, and they were not always ascribed with ethnic implications but an indicator of social status for those who adopted their history. Unlike the post-An Lushan residents with Central Asian origins who were eager to conceal their foreign backgrounds via altering their narratives of ancestors, the Liao imperial and consort clans were “conquerors” in their own dynasty, and their construction of a remote and prestigious origin from Huangdi was not in order to be accepted as members of their conquered Han subjects. Instead, descent from Huangdi would function as a marker of their noble blood, which provided them with a past comparable with their many neighbours within the contemporary multistate world, and justified their legitimacy and eligibility of being the ruling families of a state newly founded at the eve of Tang Empire’s



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collapse.

Living within a multi-state system, like many of their neighbours the Liao elites developed ideas about the place of Liao within the geographical/cosmic space. As mirrored by the Sinitic materials, the Liao elite not only constantly named Liao as a “Northern Dynasty” in diplomatic correspondence with the Song state, but also associated Liao with cosmic elements representing the cardinal direction of north, such as the colour of Black, the agent of Water, and their martial character. These elements were relational concepts that could not function on their own but depended on the very existence of one another. They were used by the Liao elite in tomb inscriptions and diplomatic letters with neighbours, revealing self-perceived image and identity as “northerners.”

Further investigations of these elements of the Liao spatial identity help us to rethink established ideas regarding the cosmic agent of Liao and the framework within which the agent was chosen. It has been widely acknowledged that the Liao elite had employed the agent of Water from the Five Agents as the representative agent of Liao, but there were several different patterns of the Five Agents and which particular scheme the Liao based its choice upon has not been questioned. Was the agent of Water discussed in the model of lineal dynastic succession or was it discussed as a matter of geographical/cosmological space?

At least based on extant materials, the idea that the Liao’s identification with Water was because it succeeded the Metal of Later Jin lacks foundation. The Liao elite did not regard

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their dynastic legitimacy as derived from their vassal - Later Jin, and the assumed successive relationship between the two was mostly based on a misinterpretation from historians of later dynasties such as Jin and Yuan, which has been further inherited by many modern scholarly works. Instead, the discourse of cosmic agents in the Liao historical context was in fact a “spatial/cosmological” issue, related to the correlations between the cardinal directions and contemporary interstate relationships. For instance, while the Liao elite assigned Liao with the colour of Black and the agent of Water, they did the same to neighbours such as Koryŏ, which had been assigned with the colour of Blue and agent of Wood. Different from the lineal scheme of the Five Agents, in which there supposed to be only one legitimate dynasty at any given time, in the Liao spatial model the agent did not represent legitimacy itself but could be allocated even to a vassal (Koryŏ). Evidently, the cosmic agents in the Liao dynasty were employed spatially as representing states in the contemporary world order, rather than indicators of a regime within the dynastic succession.

The Liao’s northern identity, however, was only part of the story. During the tenth century the Liao military expansion had already brought many surrounding powers, including those based in north China into its orbit, becoming their equal or even suzerain. And during the eleventh century through wars and negotiations, the Liao court forced Song to accept a multistate world order centred on Liao and its preferred terms of an interstate relationship. Liao also successfully subdued Koryŏ and the Tangut (Xi Xia) powers, which had been the vassals of Tang and Song. At the same time as establishing this central place in the contemporary world system, a Liao-centric ideology had been developed by the Liao elite as

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well.

Although suffering a dearth of sources, the decipherment of Kitan scripts reveals that the materials, mostly tomb inscriptions, sometimes present Liao as a “central” state. Much evidence in Sinitic also confirms that, via borrowing and reinterpreting the discourses concerning the cosmology recorded in classics and histories, the Liao elite, while ascribing Liao with elements representing the north, constantly emphasised the central position of Liao within the contemporary multistate world, especially in sources for internal consumption (e.g. inscriptions of tombs and temple stelae) and diplomatic letters with vassal states.

According to the extant materials, one of the constantly employed models was the Pole Star. The Pole Star in Sinitic classics and histories appeared as the centre of the heaven, symbolising the law of nature and longevity, and thus an embodiment of imperial sovereignty. The connection between the heavenly body of the Pole Star and the earthly realm was the “northern” cardinal direction, which in the *Erya* was the place on which the Pole Star projected itself. The implication of this is that the “northern” identity of the Liao state played an intermediate role in bridging Liao and the heavenly centre, and in establishing Liao as the direct projection of the Pole Star on the earth, which in the ideology of the Liao elite further positioned Liao as the cosmic centre and the only legitimate earthly regime in the contemporary world.

In the Liao discourse, the identity of Liao in geographical space and cosmology was thus

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duel-faceted, as both a northern and a central state, and was largely shaped by its contemporary political context and interstate relations. After the collapse of the Uighur Qaghanate and the following power vacuum in the steppe, the lack of serious threat from the north seemed to lead the Liao elite to consider the Liao place in cosmology based primarily on their relations with southern neighbours – the Five Dynasties and the Song state of the tenth century, and then, additionally, during the eleventh century also with the Koryŏ to the east and Xi Xia to the west. All of these neighbours, just like Liao, were stable regimes which largely modelled their institutions on Tang precedents. This seems to be the reason why in the extant sources at least, instead of having five cardinal directions as is often found in Sinitic historiography, in Liao cosmology there were typically four directions represented respectively by the regimes of Liao, Song, Koryŏ and Tangut (Xi Xia) that were constantly mentioned, with Liao as both the centre and the north in most cases.

The major subjects of this study, the imperial culture and designations of Liao, the Liao imperial and consort houses' interpretations of their origins, and the discourse on Liao identity in geographical/cosmic space, are topics for which the concept of ethnicity lacks satisfactory explanatory power. The Liao elite rarely treated these elements with Sinic origins as real “foreign” things, nor employed them merely for gaining support from those from Han cultures. Instead, they were regarded as and became an integral part of Liao society and Liao culture. During the course of the Liao dynasty they were taken as native elements of Liao itself that justified its very existence and the perceived predominance amongst the Eastern Eurasian contemporaries of Liao. But the Liao ruling elites seldom employed these Sinic

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elements in an attempt to change their own original ethnic identification. They maintained boundaries between different ethnic groups, and the nomadic and Kitan cultures were carefully protected. The Liao ruling families valued the elements with Sinic origins because they were viewed as universal and sagely legacies available to be shared by everyone who cared about social status at the time, not only by the Liao elite but also those of other Eastern Eurasian regimes.

No doubt ethnic identity is a useful theoretical concept for us to understand interactions between human groups in the past and present. The concept not only has its roots in pre-modern times, but also continues to play a crucial part in shaping and affecting minds of “modern” individuals, nations, and other forms of human/social groups. But this thesis hopes to provide an alternative way for us to approach the historical interactions and identity issues of peoples that have always been treated by scholars as different ethnic groups, and to think about the “hegemonic” force of ethnic thinking itself in modern scholarship rather than the mere hegemonic discourses of a certain ethnic group within a multi-ethnic society.

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





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