

THE LIVES OF THE LIAO (907-1125)
ARISTOCRATIC WOMEN

by
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ABBREVIATIONS

LS *Liaoshi* 遼史

QDGZ *Qidan Guozhi* 契丹國志

WS *Weishu* 魏書

JTS *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書

XTS *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書

JWDS *Jiu Wudaishi* 舊五代史

XWDS *Xin Wudaishi* 新五代史

XZTC *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編

ZT *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑

ABSTRACT

The Liao dynasty, founded by the Khitans who originated from the northeast corner of Manchuria, is often characterized by its women's exceptional political authority and high social standing. This dissertation investigates various activities of the Khitan aristocratic women, particularly the imperial women, in the public realms, such as politics, military, and court ceremonies. In addition to Chinese official dynastic histories, this study utilizes archaeological data obtained largely from excavation reports of the Liao tombs that produced female occupants. This dissertation is intended to reconstruct as concrete picture of their lives as possible by adopting an interdisciplinary approach. In doing so, it seeks to explain how and why the Khitan women of the Liao dynasty were granted such high social prestige and political power. It also contemplates on the question whether the Khitans were assimilated by the Chinese culture by the late dynastic period.

The first part of this study is focused on analyzing the patterns of the Khitan imperial marriage and their traditional inheritance practices in the context of the consolidation of the empire. The Liao imperial clan, the Yelü, maintained an exclusive marriage alliance with another ruling clan, the Xiao, which produced all of the Liao empresses during the entire dynastic period. This marriage alliance, devised to ensure their monopoly of power, eventually worked for the advantage of the Xiao women, as well as their clansmen who dominated the Liao political power.

Women's conspicuous participation in various public affairs was deeply rooted in the Khitan tribal tradition. The Khitans lacked the Chinese concept of segregation of gender roles and the Khitan women were employed at the court in the capacity of a

religious professional (shaman) or even as a military commander. The observation of the mortuary practices of the Khitan suggests that they remained attached to their cultural traditions until the late dynastic period. This can be attested by the discovery of the unique Khitan funerary paraphernalia, such as gold masks and metal burial suits, and the evidence of animal sacrifices in their tombs.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to expand our knowledge on the Khitan elite women by observing various roles that they played in the realms of politics, society, traditional rituals during the Liao 遼 dynasty (907-1125). The Khitans who founded the Liao dynasty were semi-nomadic people originated in the upper Liao River (Shira muren) basins along the borders of Mongolia and Manchuria. This area, known as Songmo 松漠 in traditional Chinese histories, is the interface of the dense forests of Manchuria and the vast grasslands in Mongolia suited for animal grazing.¹ Because of their geographical location, the Khitan tribes were adapted to both nomadic pastoralism, practiced by the tribes in the steppes in Mongolia and Central Asia, and more sedentary economy based on hunting and farming that their eastern neighbors employed. The pre-dynastic Khitan economy must have incorporated some agriculture, considering the favorable climate and fertile soil in the region. Nevertheless, its foundation was clearly animal husbandry marked by seasonal migrations.²

Although the existence and activities of the Khitans had been noted in histories from the fourth century on, they did not play a major political role in China until the late ninth century, during which they rapidly rose to power and established their military hegemony in the Northern Asia by taking advantage of the collapse of the central

¹ Denis Twitchett and Klaus-Peter Tietze, "The Liao", in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 6, Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368*, eds. Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43-4; Karl August Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng. *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907-1125.)* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1949), 41-2.

² *Ibid.*,.

administration of once mighty Tang 唐 dynasty (618-907). At the peak of its prosperity, the Liao controlled a vast territory which encompassed the most part of Manchuria (modern provinces of Jilin, Liaoning, Heilongjiang), Inner and Outer Mongolia, as well as the northern tip of China Proper (Shanxi and Hebei).³

Although the Liao occupied only a small and marginal area of China Proper, its significance in Chinese history should not be underestimated. The establishment of the Liao empire signaled the beginning of the era of “conquest dynasties”, during which parts of China or the whole China was subjected to a prolonged foreign occupation by various “barbarians” from the north.⁴ The Khitans were replaced by another fierce people from Manchuria named the Jurchen, who succeeded in conquering the whole of north China by forcing the native Chinese state, the Song 宋 (960-1279), to flee to the south in the early twelfth century. While the Khitan and the Jurchen rulers were satisfied with their partial conquest of China and with the state of co-existence with the Han-Chinese regime, the Song dynasty, the Mongols were different from their predecessors in this respect. They set their ambition high at the conquest of the known world and they successfully accomplished it by conquering much of Russia, Eastern Europe, Central and West Asia, all of China and the Korean peninsula. The fall of the Southern Song dynasty in 1279 was a significant moment in Chinese history because China for the first time was

³ Twitchett and Tietze, 43; Wittfogel and Feng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907-1125)*, 41. For further geographical sketch of this region, see also F. W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 23-30.

⁴ Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 6, Alien Regimes and Border States, 960-1368*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 41; Wittfogel and Feng, 1-5.

incorporated into a vast foreign empire and constituted merely one part of its territory.⁵ By the time the Mongol-Yuan dynasty disintegrated in 1368, North China had been under foreign domination for prolonged period of time. For instance, Beijing had been under foreign control for four consecutive centuries and the western part of the Gansu Province for six.⁶ Han Chinese regained their control of the regions under the Ming 明 dynasty (1368-1644) but they eventually succumbed to the military supremacy of another foreign power from the north, the Manchu, who considered themselves as descendants of the Jurchens. The Manchu rulers successfully ruled China under the name of the Qing 清 (1616-1911) until the hereditary monarchy was abolished in favor of the system of republic in the early twentieth century.

As the first conquest dynasty, the Liao offered a model for all the subsequent conquest regimes.⁷ The ruling elites of the Jin 金 (1115-1234), Yuan 元 (1206-1368) and Qing dynasties conscientiously studied and followed to varying degrees the unique Liao administrative institutions in order to effectively govern a complex multi-ethnic state, whose conquered subjects, comprised mainly of Chinese, greatly outnumbered the conquerors. The Liao rulers subscribed to the principle of dualism and segregation. Two administrations were established in order to govern separately the tribal pastoral population in the north and the sedentary agricultural communities in the south, which comprised of mostly Chinese and other conquered subjects. Instead of creating a

⁵ H. Franke and D. Twitchett, 40-1.

⁶ H. Franke and D. Twitchett, 2.

⁷ Wittfogel and Feng, 3; Jing-shen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988),10; F.M. Mote, 32; H. Franke and D. Twitchett, 25.

universal law code applicable to the entire population, the Liao judicial system employed side by side the Khitan customary laws and the Chinese code that they inherited from the Tang dynasty.⁸ Even when the rulers of the subsequent conquest dynasties did not follow the Liao dualism precisely, they took it as the precedent and their policies continued to reflect the same ambivalence that the Khitan rulers had towards adopting Chinese institutions and culture.

Through their two hundred years of domination of the Northeast Asia, the Khitans left a legacy that went far beyond the scope of Chinese history. Because they occupied and controlled the strategically and commercially important regions in North Asia that connected China to Central Asia and the regions farther west, the West came to believe that the Khitans were “Chinese” who ruled all of China, without knowing the difference between these two ethnic groups, political divisions of China at the time and the existence of native Chinese state, the Song dynasty (960-1279).⁹ In the mid-thirteenth century, more than a hundred years after the fall of the Liao empire, Friars John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, who were sent to the Mongol court as envoys of the pope in Rome, referred to China as Kataia, Khitaya, Cathaia or Cathay. Marco Polo also used Cathay as the general designation for China, specifically for North China, as opposed to Manzi for Southern China. Kithay in its various forms is still used today to

⁸ For more information on the Liao legal system, see Herbert Franke, “Chinese Law in a Multinational Society: The Case of the Liao (907-1125).” Paper presented to the History of Chinese Medieval Law Conference, Bellagio, Italy (August, 1981), reprint in *Asia Major* 5(1992), 111-127

⁹ Twitchett and Tietze, 43-4.

refer to China in Russian and other Slavonic languages, as well as in Greek, Turkish and Persian.¹⁰

In this study, two basic issues will be addressed, which may appear very different and totally unrelated to each other at first glance. The first issue concerns women's political authority and social standing in the conquest dynasties while the second one deals with rethinking the theories of cultural assimilation of the ruling elites of the alien conquest dynasties. Our investigation and discussion will be focused on the Khitan of the Liao dynasty, particularly the elite women.

It has been generally agreed that aristocratic women of the conquest dynasties had greater political power, economic independence, and freedom in their social behavior than their counterparts of the Chinese dynasties.¹¹ The Liao dynasty is also characterized by a series of powerful empresses who played a dominant role in the Liao court politics and even in military in a conspicuous manner. Three empresses ruled the empire as de facto sovereigns, two of whom maintained their own standing army and personally led military expeditions as commanders-in-chief. All these seem to substantiate the aforementioned argument that the elite women of the conquest dynasties indeed enjoyed particularly high social prestige and great power. However, Jennifer Holmgren recently raised some interesting questions that led us to rethink the validity of the well-established

¹⁰ *Ibid.*,; Wittfogel and Feng, 2; Christopher Dawson, ed. *Mission to Asia*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 5 and 20; A. C. Moule, *Quinsai with other notes on Marco Polo*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957).

¹¹ Wittfogel and Feng, 199-202; Herbert Franke, "Women under Conquest Dynasties," in *La Donna nella Cina imperiale e nella Cina repubblicana*, ed. Lionello Lanciotti, (Florence: Leo S. Olschiki, 1980), 23-43; Jennifer Holmgren, "Imperial Marriage in the Native Chinese and Non-Han State, Han to Ming," in *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, eds. Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 58-96, particularly 58.

idea. I was duly intrigued and inspired by her statement that the number of the Liao female regents was in fact considerably low, compared to many native Chinese dynasties, including the Northern Song dynasty 北宋 (960-1127), the contemporary of the Liao, which produced five female regents in only 166 years of its existence.¹² She further maintained that the imperial wives in native Chinese regimes were in fact offered with “greater legal authority and power” than their counterparts in any of the conquest dynasties of non-Han origin.¹³

Needless to say, domination of political power by women was by no means a unique phenomenon that occurred only in the dynasties of foreign origins. On the contrary, regency of imperial wife was a time-honored Chinese institution, which was deeply rooted in their strong patriarchal and patrilineal traditions. It was devised to ensure successful transmission of throne within the imperial lineage in times of crisis.¹⁴ A total of three dozens of imperial wives of both foreign and native dynasties ruled China in that capacity throughout the imperial era. Then what makes powerful empresses of the conquest dynasties, particularly of the Liao, “unique”?

Perhaps the most remarkable and distinctive characteristic of the Liao empresses is that all of them came from a single clan named Xiao 蕭 who had an exclusive and

¹² Jennifer Holmgren, “Imperial Marriage,” 90. During the Northern Song period, five empresses-dowagers took over the reins of the government as regents. For further information see Priscilla Chung, *Palace Women in the Northern Song 960-1126* (Lieden: E.J. Brill, 1981). See particularly “Chapter Four- Advancement”, and “Chapter Five-Power and Prestige”, 39-79. A more recent and comprehensive study was done by Zhang Bangwei, *Songdai Huangqin yu zhengzhi*, (Chengdu: Sichuan: Renmin Press, 1993). See Chapter Two “Songdai Houfei yu Zhengzhi”, 122-94.

¹³ Jennifer Holmgren, “Imperial Marriage”, 90.

¹⁴ Lien-sheng Yang, “Female Rulers in Imperial China”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 23 (1960-1961): 47-61.

permanent claims to provide spouses for the members of the imperial clan, the Yelü 耶律. To be more precise, two branches of the Xiao clan, derived from the brothers of the first Liao empress, Xiao Dilu 蕭敵魯(d. 918) and Xiao Aguzhi 蕭阿古只, supplied almost all subsequent Liao empresses as well as the vast majority of spouses for the imperial princesses throughout the dynastic era. Moreover, the Xiao clansmen dominated key offices in the Liao administration by exercising their hereditary privileges. For this reason, it is absolutely crucial to understand how the exclusive and reciprocal marriage alliance between the clans of the dynastic founder, Yelü Abaoji 耶律阿保機 (872-926), later canonized as Taizu 太祖 (r. 907-926), and his wife, Empress Chunqin 淳欽皇后 (d.953), was initially established and how both clans were benefited from this permanent alliance throughout the dynastic period. More importantly, what consequences did it bring on the formation of the Liao power structure and how did it affect women? If the Liao imperial women indeed enjoyed extraordinary power and prestige, what aspects of the Khitan traditional social and political structure allowed them to have such prerogative? How did the adoption of Chinese political and social institutions, which gradually increased since the beginning of the dynastic era, affect them?

The initial three chapters of this study will be devoted to describing some of the important characteristics of the pre-dynastic Khitan tribal society, such as their kin structure, marriage, inheritance and succession practices pertinent to leadership transfer in order for us to understand how they were accommodated when their tribal confederation was transformed into a centralized hereditary monarchy modeled on the Chinese dynasties. In the fourth chapter, we will investigate lives and careers of three

arguably the most powerful empresses-dowagers in the Liao history; Empress Chunqin, aforementioned wife of the dynastic founder, Empress Ruizhi 睿智皇后 (d. 1009), wife of the fifth Liao emperor, Jingzong 景宗 (r. 969-82), and Empress Qinai 欽哀皇后 (d. 1058), empress of the sixth emperor, Shengzong 聖宗 (r. 982-1031), respectively. A comparison will be drawn between these Liao empresses and some of the empresses-regents of the Northern Song dynasty in terms of their familial backgrounds and the circumstances under which they seized and consolidated their power.

In the last two chapters, we will attempt to explore the Khitan women's lives beyond the realm of court politics. Women occupied a special place in the tribal myth of origin and they played an indispensable role in both religious and secular ceremonies. A particular attention will be given to the description of their rituals of death and mourning. Since the traditional Chinese dynastic histories, including the *Liaoshi*, largely consisted of descriptions of the court affairs, they generally contain little information on women except a few brief biographies of politically active imperial consorts, princesses and morally upright women. Almost nothing was written about ordinary women. To make the matters worse, the Liao did not produce a large quantity of literature of any kind in the first place, compared to other dynasties. None of it survives today except a few tomb eulogies and Buddhist inscriptions. Except the *Liaoshi*, which is known for containing a fairly high number of errors and inconsistencies, we rely on only a handful of primary sources and a few tomb eulogies. We will return to the problem of deficiency of the sources below. Fortunately, the *Liaoshi* provides some invaluable descriptions of their

unique tribal rituals held at court, during some of which female religious personnel were employed.

Thanks to the remarkable progress in the Liao archaeology in People's Republic of China during the last fifty years, particularly in the field of tomb discoveries, the situation has changed for the better. Although the vast majority of the burials discovered so far appear to have belonged to the aristocrats, a few humble ones have also been found, some of which contained female occupants. Needless to say, these discoveries provide us with an invaluable opportunity to have a glimpse at the lives that the Khitan commoners, particularly women, led in this world, as well as their beliefs about the afterlife. By observing their mortuary culture and traditional rituals, we will contemplate on the theories of cultural assimilation or "sinicization".

China had a long tradition of perceiving itself as the center of the civilization or more precisely, as the only civilized state surrounded by peoples who were culturally inferior and politically unsophisticated. Since the ancient times, the Chinese designated their neighboring peoples as "barbarians" and firmly believed that the barbarians would acknowledge superiority of the Chinese culture and eventually be assimilated by it.¹⁵ Many of their neighbors in East Asia, like Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, indeed adopted and applied successfully the Chinese form of government, the written language, political ideologies, calendar, even music and arts.¹⁶ It is undisputable that China left a profound and lasting influence in East Asia. Deeply immersed in the sense of superiority and

¹⁵ Jing-shen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, 1-9; Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757*, (Cambridge, Mass.; Blackwell, 1989), 2-5.

¹⁶ Thomas J. Barfield, 2; F. W. Mote, *Imperial China*, 28-9.

ethnocentric view of the world, Chinese historiographers of the past perpetually depicted the Chinese foreign relations as China occupying the superior position and other states as its vassals even though sometimes it was not an accurate representation of the reality. Same bias was prevalent when the issue of cultural interaction was dealt with. It was always the barbarians who adopted or converted to Chinese culture and never the other way around.¹⁷ The reality was different. China could not always maintain its dominance over the barbarians, particularly those from the steppes in the north, some of whom demanded a relationship with China as equals. Moreover, not all of them were won over by the superiority of Chinese culture and were assimilated into Chinese society.

Because the vast majority of the historical records available to us today were written by the Chinese from their perspectives, the historians face a great challenge of interpreting the sources objectively without getting influenced by the inherent biases in the sources.¹⁸ However, during the last few decades a number of great scholars in China and in the west achieved a great progress in reassessing the traditional Chinese scholarship and presenting much more realistic pictures of China's foreign relations of the past.¹⁹ The theory of cultural assimilation has been also seriously questioned. Today the majority of scholars of Chinese history no longer subscribe to the idea that cultural

¹⁷ Jing-shen Tao explains that this was deeply rooted in Confucian ideology, according which it was natural for the Chinese to win over the barbarians with their superior moral values. Mencius (372-289 B.C.) is said to have claimed, "I have heard of men using the doctrines of our great land to change barbarians, but I have never yet heard of being changed by barbarians." See Jing-shen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, 1-2.

¹⁸ Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 1-5; Jing-shen Tao, 1-9; Evelyn S. Rawski, "Presidential Address: Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History", *Journal of Asian Studies* 55:4 (1996): 829-50.

¹⁹ Jing-shen Tao, 4; Evelyn S. Rawski, "Reenvisioning the Qing": 829-832.

contacts between Chinese and “the barbarians” invariably resulted in the latter receiving influence from the former. Nevertheless, this idea still occupies an important place particularly in the study of the conquest dynasties of the Liao, Jin, Yuan and the Qing.

Both traditional and modern scholarship attributed the adoption of Chinese institutions and the cultural assimilation of the ruling elites of the conquest dynasties as the key to their political success. The Qing is considered beyond dispute as the most successful alien dynasty and its rulers the most *sinicized* among all foreign rulers. The Khitan rulers of the Liao dynasty also adopted the Chinese model of state organization, administrative systems, bureaucracy, Chinese imperial court ceremonies and official clothes. Whether this indicates that the Khitan ruling elite were assimilated by Chinese culture to a considerable degree is still debatable.

Almost sixty years ago, Karl Wittfogel introduced his classification of the conquest dynasties into two subgroups of “culturally resistant and culturally yielding” in his monumental research on the Liao society. He placed the Liao as the primary example of culturally resistant dynasty as opposed to the Jin, which was more willing to integrate the ruling Jurchens and the conquered Chinese.²⁰ Karl Wittfogel believed that the vast majority of the Khitan population was not absorbed into the Chinese society when the Liao dynasty collapsed despite the two hundred years of co-existence of the two peoples. Most Khitans surrendered to the invading Jurchen tribes or fled north into the Mongolian steppes. Some loyalists followed a scion of the imperial Yelü family, Yelü Dashi

²⁰ Wittfogel and Feng, 8 and 24-5. For the case study of the Jurchen-Jin dynasty, see Jing-shen Tao, *The Jurchen in twelfth-century China: A Study of Sinicization*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977).

耶律大石, all the way to Central Asia where they established another successful conquest empire called the Xi Liao 西遼(Western Liao) or Khara Khitai.²¹ There was no massive influx of the Khitan refugees into the Song territory, according to Karl Wittfogel. Therefore, most Khitans were not absorbed into Chinese population. Many Chinese historians and archaeologists active today, however, continue to embrace the time-honored idea of the universalism and superiority of the Chinese culture. They still employ the narrow traditional framework of dividing the Liao history into three periods, the early, the middle and the late and argue that the Liao society became gradually sinicized accordingly. Particularly the members of the Khitan ruling class were so profoundly transformed by the Chinese influence that they even shared the cultural values by the late dynastic period. By utilizing both archaeological and historical sources, I will strive to prove that such framework is no longer useful in explaining the Liao cultural history and will attempt to illuminate how the Khitans, particularly the women, were affected by the importation of Chinese goods and culture. I will start with a brief description of the primary and secondary sources on the Liao at our disposal.

²¹ Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, 151-3. Because the Khara Khitan Empire occupied the regions in modern Central Asia (from the west of the Altai mountains all the way to the Aral sea), its history is considered a part of the Central Asian history. The vast majority of the historical records were also written in Arabic or Persian, except a few passages that can be found in Chinese historical sources such as the dynastic histories of the Liao and the Jin. Karl Wittfogel's summary of this dynasty in Appendix V still remains as one of few authoritative researches in western languages. See Wittfogel and Feng, 619-74.

Problems of the Primary sources

What makes an investigation of the Liao period particularly challenging is that few primary sources from the period are available to us today. But the scarcity is not the only problem. The dynastic history of the Liao, the *Liaoshi* 遼史, is by far the most important source for the period but its deficiencies and inconsistencies are well known among the historians. The *Liaoshi* is unique in the sense that it was compiled more than two hundred years after the collapse of the dynasty. Although it was the norm that a succeeding dynasty to take on the responsibility of compiling the official history of the preceding dynasty, the Jin court officials could never reconcile their differences when it came to the issue of legitimacy of the Liao dynasty. Some officials argued that the Liao deserved to be treated as an orthodox northern dynasty because it maintained its independence and diplomatic equality with its contemporary Chinese dynasty, the Song. Therefore, its dynastic history ought to be compiled separately like the history of the Northern Wei 北魏 dynasty (386-535).²² Other officials refused to grant such an equal status to the Liao and emphasized that it occupied only peripheral and insignificant regions of China Proper. They insisted that its history should be appended to the Song dynastic history with other frontier regimes like the Xi Xia 西夏(1038-1227).

Despite such political complications, a number of attempts to compile a Liao history were made and yielded partial results on two separate occasions. In 1148, Xiao

²² Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, "Bibliographical Essays", in *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 6, 665-675 and particularly 667; Wittfogel and Feng, "Appendix IV: History of Text, Editions, Supplementary Researches", *History of Chinese Society Liao (907-1125)*, 610-8.

Yongchi, a Jin official of an obvious Khitan heritage, presented to the throne the Liao history in seventy five chapters but it was deemed too brief and insufficient. In 1189, thirteen officials at the Office of Historiography 國史院 at the Jin court were assigned to the project of compile a Liao dynastic history. The progress of the project was delayed because of frequent interruptions caused by the factional struggles surrounding the issue of legitimacy. In 1207, almost eighteen years later, Chen Daren 陳大任 finally submitted to the throne an incomplete version of the history of the Liao,²³

The Mongol-Yuan dynasty inherited the legitimacy debate from the Jin, but it managed to put it to rest. In 1343, Prime Minister Tuo Tuo 脫脫 (1313-1355) was appointed to oversee a group of historiographers entrusted with the task of compiling dynastic histories of the Liao, Jin and Song. He once and for all silenced all the arguments by proclaiming that all three dynasties were equally legitimate. In the following year, the compilation of the *Liaoshi* was completed.²⁴ Throughout this study, the *Liaoshi* will be more frequently referred to than any other sources. For this reason, a brief discussion of its major sources as well as its problems and limitations seems appropriate.

The *Liaoshi* was written primarily on the basis of three earlier historical works, one of which is dated to the Liao period. The first was the “veritable records (*shilu* 實錄)”, compiled by Yelü Yan 耶律儼, then Director of Office of Historiography

²³ Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, “Bibliographical Essays”, 666-7; Wittfogel and Feng, 611; *Jin shi*, eds. Tuo Tuo et al., (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 12: 282 and 125: 27271.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Hok-lam Chan, “Chinese official historiography at the Yüan court: the Composition of the Liao, Chin, and Sung Histories,” in *China under Mongol Rule*, ed. John D. Langlois, Jr. (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 1981), 56-106.

during the reign of the last Liao emperor, Tianzuo 天祚 (r.1101-1125).²⁵ Following up on the emperor's order, Yelü Yan collected all the veritable records of the preceding reigns and presented the work in seventy chapters to the throne in 1103.²⁶ Chen Daren's incomplete Liao history, compiled in 1207, was also used by the editors of the *Liaoshi*. Both Yelü Yan's veritable records and Chen Daren's history, at least in partial forms, survived until the early Ming period but were lost for good sometime afterwards. The *Qidan guozhi* 契丹國志 (Monograph on the Khitan State), written by Ye Longli 葉隆禮, is the last and the only primary source of the *Liaoshi* that is extant today. Little is known about the author except that he was a Southern Song scholar from Zhejiang, who earned his *jinshi* degree in 1247. It is speculated that the monograph, comprised of twenty seven chapters, was completed not long after he acquired his degree.²⁷ Since it was written by relying exclusively on Song sources, it provides us with an opportunity to study the Liao period through the lens of the contemporary Song Chinese. In addition to these three sources, the *Liaoshi* occasionally refers to an earlier compilation of the Liao veritable records edited by Xiao Hanjianu 蕭韓家奴, who headed the Office of National Historiography during the reign of Xingzong (r. 1031-1055). Xiao Hanjianu's edition of the records was completed in 1044 and covered the dynastic period until the end of the

²⁵ For the official biography of Yelü Yan, see *Liaoshi (LS)*, eds. Tuo Tuo et al., (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 98: 1416. See also LS 24:290 and 27:320.

²⁶ Wittfogel and Feng, 504; Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, "Bibliographical essays," 666; LS 27:320; LS 9: 1416.

²⁷ Wittfogel and Feng, 28 and 610-11; Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, "Bibliographical Essays," 668; Jennifer Holmgren, "Yeh-lü, Yao-lien and Ta-ho: Views of the hereditary prerogative in Early Khitan Leadership", *Papers on Far Eastern History*, 34 (1986): 37-81, particularly 39.

reign of Shengzong.²⁸ It apparently included the history of the imperial lineage and an account on the pre-dynastic era. This work is also said to have been lost during the Ming period.²⁹

It is reasonable to speculate that the editors of the *Liaoshi* had very few documents from the period at their disposal, except some partial manuscripts of two versions of veritable records, described above. The Liao government kept their official records in Khitan and Chinese but the vast majority of them were destroyed at the fall of the dynasty and during the Mongol conquest of the Jin dynasty. The deficiency of the *Liaoshi* as a standard official dynastic history is perfectly understandable considering its late date of compilation and the scarcity of original documents. But not all of the original written sources from the Liao were destroyed during the violent dynastic changes and social chaos that followed. They simply never existed in the first place. Compared to Chinese dynasties or even other conquest dynasties like the Jin, the Liao dynasty produced a fairly small number of historical writings. This was in part due to the tentative attitude of the Khitan rulers towards keeping accurate and thorough historical records.

According to the *Liaoshi*, the Liao emperors did show some enthusiasm about preserving their history. Taizong 太宗(r. 927-947) was the first Liao emperor who commissioned his officials to compile a historical account of the earliest Khitan ancestor,

²⁸ Wittfogel and Feng, 500-1 and. 610; LS 103: 1445-1450.

²⁹ According to Karl Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, this work was included in a Ming literature catalogue in four volumes along with the later collection of the veritable records compiled by Yelü Yan. See Wittfogel and Feng, 610.

Qishou Khaghan 奇首可汗 in 941.³⁰ Although the existence of the Office of National Historiography (*guoshiyuan*) in the Liao government was first mentioned during the reign of Shengzong (r. 982-1031), it is possible that it was probably established much earlier.³¹ In 991, the veritable records of the Liao dynasty were compiled for the first time. It is also evident from the *Liaoshi* that court diarists (*shiguan* 史官) were actively employed to write down daily records (*rili* 日曆) by this time.³² All succeeding Liao emperors continued to support the project of extending already existing veritable records, which resulted in compiling all the records except those from the reign of the last emperor, Tianzu. I mentioned above that two versions of the records compiled by Xiao Hanjanu in 1044 and by Yelü Yan in 1103 were referred to by the *Liaoshi* editors.

Despite such efforts, the Liao rulers do not appear to have fully understood the responsibility of fair record-keeping because they frequently ignored the old Chinese tradition that prescribed the rulers not to interfere with the activities of the historiographers.³³ According to the *Liaoshi*, the Khitan emperors occasionally demanded to inspect the daily records.³⁴ When the dutiful officials refused to show the records to the emperor, they were severely penalized with a round of beating and exiled. In 1003, Shengzong, who appeared conscientious about record-keeping by authorizing the first compilation of the veritable records years earlier, ordered not to include

³⁰ LS 4: 49; Wittfogel and Feng, 28 and 497.

³¹ Wittfogel and Feng, 499; LS 13:141; LS 79:1271-2.

³² *Ibid.*; LS 14: 158; LS 15: 169.

³³ Wittfogel and Feng, 610; Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, "Bibliographical Essays," 665.

³⁴ Wittfogel and Feng, 501-503; LS 21:254; LS 103: 1445-1450.

“insignificant matters” in the entries of the daily records.³⁵ Daozong abolished altogether the practice of court diarists attending the sessions of court audience. Instead, they were supposed to receive instructions from the cabinet ministers as to what to write.³⁶

In fact, the *Liaoshi* accounts are at times at variance with other Chinese historical works, such as the dynastic history of the Song (the *Song shi*) or the *Qidan guozhi*. Some events recorded in Chinese sources do not appear in the *Liaoshi*. When the same incident is described in the *Liaoshi* and Chinese histories, the latter tend to provide a much more unflattering version than the former. Such discrepancy is particularly evident concerning the early history of the Liao, which will be discussed in further detail in the following chapters of this study. Obviously the Liao historiographers cleansed the historical records to serve their own political agenda. But the Chinese record-keepers were also guilty of leaving biased accounts on the “northern barbarians” whom they much resented for encroaching upon their territory and demanding a large amount of annual subsidy.

Not only does the *Liaoshi* contain conflicting accounts with other sources but also it frequently contradicts itself. Whatever flaws and problems the *Liaoshi* has, it still remains to be the most important primary source for the period concerned. It is particularly useful for the purpose of this study because it provides invaluable data on the Khitan tribal organization, social structure, secular traditions and customs that cannot be found in any other sources.³⁷ To supplement the *Liaoshi*, I utilized various Chinese dynastic histories and *Qidan guizhi* for the purpose of cross-examination of the *Liaoshi*

³⁵ Wittfogel and Feng, 499: LS 14:158.

³⁶ Wittfogel and Feng, 501: LS 21:254.

³⁷ Wittfogel and Feng, 28-9.

accounts. In addition, I referred to a number of non-historical sources, such as essays or travel accounts written by Song scholars who visited the Khitan state, and inscriptions from the Khitan tombs. It is regrettable that no writings of Khitan women are available to us. In writing about the Khitan funerary culture, I mostly relied on excavation reports of the Liao tombs published in Chinese archaeological journals. Among the secondary sources, I was benefited greatly from Karl Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng's *History of Chinese society: Liao (907-1125)*, published in 1949. Despite its old date, this voluminous book is still considered the best comprehensive investigation of the Liao dynasty by providing meticulous descriptions of its government, social structure, military organization, tribal life, economy, religious activities and geography.³⁸

³⁸ Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, "Bibliographical Essays," 670.

CHAPTER 1: THE KHITAN KINSHIP STRUCTURE, INHERITANCE, AND SUCCESSION

Introduction

We cannot begin to explore the unique characteristics of the Liao power structure and women's place in it without discussing the exclusive marriage between the two ruling clans of the Liao, the Yelü and the Xiao. In fact, they were the only clans in the Liao dynasty that had clan names. In order for us to understand the circumstances under which the marriage alliance between them was initiated and sustained, it is absolutely crucial that we learn about the traditional Khitan kin structure, their inheritance and succession practices, which are said to have deviated from those of the Chinese to a great degree. Primary sources offer few relevant information on the subject, which led many scholars to rely on their logical speculations in coming up with various hypotheses. Here we will attempt to investigate and verify the validity of a number of well-established hypotheses in order to reconstruct the most plausible picture of the Khitan kinship structure.

Definition of a Kin in the Khitan Tribal Society

Neither comprehensive description on the Khitan kin structure nor original Khitan kinship terms are provided in extant sources. One of the few remotely pertinent statements comes from *Qidan Guozhi* 契丹國志, which claims that the pre-dynastic Khitans originally had no clan names until Abaoji transformed the tribal confederation

into the hereditary monarchy based on the Chinese models in the beginning of the tenth century. Even then, only two clans—the Yelü and its consort clan, Xiao—were established.¹ A memorial recorded in the *Liaoshi* further confirms the statement of *Qidan Guozhi*. It was submitted to Daozong 道宗 (r. 1155-1101) in 1074 by an official named Yelü Shuzhen 耶律庶箴 (d. 1082), who petitioned the emperor to extend the practice of establishing clan names outside of the two clans so that all the Khitan tribes have surnames in order to “regulate marriages in accordance with the propriety”.² His request was refused by Daozong who thought that the old custom should not be changed abruptly. In any case, this memorial substantiates the claim that the Khitan, excluding the two ruling houses, the Yelü and the Xiao, were without clan names throughout the dynastic period. To have a clan name was one of the exclusive prerogatives of the two ruling clans.

It is important to note, however, that the *Liaoshi* contains contradictory statements in the chapter titled the Genealogical Table (*shibiao* 世表) that the Khitan were ruled by the leaders from the Dahe clan 大賀氏 and later the Yaolian clan 遙輦氏 almost throughout the entire Sui 隋 (581-618) and Tang 唐 period (618-907) until the leadership was transferred to Abaoji of the Yelü clan in the early tenth century.³ The rulers from the Dahe clan are identified in Tang histories with their alternative name, Li 李, the name of the Tang imperial house. The Tang royal surname, along with the official title of

¹ Ye Longli, *Qidan guozhi*, 23:191, in *Liaoshi Hubian Vol. 7* (Taipei: Dingwen Shuju, 1973).

² Wittfogel and Feng, 264; LS 89:1350.

³ LS 63: 949-50.

Governor-general of the Songmo Region(*songmo dudu* 松漠都督), was first bestowed by the Tang court on Kuge 窟哥 in 647, who led the confederation of the eight Khitan tribes to the formal submission to the Tang. After the death of Kuge, his kinsmen and descendants continued to be enfeoffed as Tang vassals until the beginning of the eighth century when the Dahe clan gradually declined and the Khitan allegiance was transferred back to the Türks.⁴ By the middle of the eighth century, according to the *Liaoshi*, a new ruling clan named Yaolian arose, which produced nine rulers in succession, until Abaoji assumed the leadership in 907.⁵ Zuwu Khaghan 阻午可汗, the second ruler from the Yaolian family, once again received the Tang imperial name when he temporarily accepted the Tang suzerainty in 745.⁶ If the sources clearly stated that the pre-dynastic Khitan were ruled by two clans named Dahe (Li) and Yaolian consecutively, how should such conflicting statements from *Qidan guozhi* and the memorial by Yelü Xūzhen in the *Liaoshi* that the Khitan had no clan names be interpreted?

Most scholars agree that the Liao imperial clan name Yelü originated in their tribal name, Yila (Diela 迭剌). In the light of this fact, it is plausible that Dahe and

⁴ Songmo refers to the region north of Liao (Shira Muren) River. The Tang established an administrative center there to control the Khitan tribes in the early seventh century. Denis Twitchett and Klaus-Peter Tietze, “The Liao”, 45-6; Wittfogel and Feng, 86 footnote no. 20; *Jiu Tang shu (JTS)*, ed. Liu Xu, et al., (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 199:5350; *Xin Tang shu (XTS)*, eds. Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 219:6167-8; *Zizhi tongjian (ZT)*, ed. Sima Guang, (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1962):6037, 6050 and 6082; LS 63: 952-3.

⁵ LS 45:711; LS 63: 955-6. A list of nine Khaghans from the Yaolian clan is provided in a chronological order of Wa 窪, Zuwu, Hula 胡剌, Su 蘇, Xianzhi 鮮質, Zhaogu 昭古, Yelan 耶瀾 (Qushu 屈戌), Bala 巴剌(Xier 習爾), and Hendejin 痕德董(Qinde 欽德) Khaghan, respectively.

⁶ His Chinese name was Li Huaixiu 李懷秀. The *Liaoshi* also claims that Zuwu Khaghan was made the Khitan ruler by a certain Nili 泥禮, who is said to have been the progenitor of Abaoji’s Yelü clan. Zuwu Khaghan was appointed Governor of Songmo and received a Tang royal woman as his wife in 745 but later that year he killed his wife and revolted against the Tang. See XTS 219: 6172; LS 63: 955-6; Jennifer Holmgren, “Yeh-lü, Yaolian and Ta-ho”: 56-7.

Yaolian represented the names of two tribes that flourished and led the confederation at two different points in the pre-dynastic period. Jennifer Holmgren offered a very interesting and convincing hypothesis on the origin of the name Dahe. She suggested that Dahe was originally not the name of a ruling clan but denoted an office of Supreme Leadership of the confederation. The title must have been introduced to the Khitan by the Türks in the beginning of the seventh century when the former were under the political domination of the latter. Prior to the seventh century, the Khitan tribes were loosely connected to each other without overarching leadership. Each tribe was governed autonomously by its chieftain and collaborated with other tribes only when military emergencies broke out that required an act of joint defense. Permanent confederation was not formed until the Khitan came under the Türkish influence.⁷

The title Dahe was probably used only ephemerally and quickly forgotten, according to the hypothesis of Jennifer Holmgren. When the editors of Tang histories in the tenth century came across the word Dahe in historical materials, they misunderstood it as the name of a ruling clan, which, they believed, had produced all the leaders of the early Khitan confederation. Almost all the histories compiled after Tang simply followed their statements without criticism and repeatedly listed Dahe as a Khitan clan name.⁸

⁷ The basis of her hypothesis was that the Khitan tribal chieftains during the Northern Wei 北魏 period (398-534) were called *mofuhe* 莫弗賀, which was certainly in use until the Sui dynasty. The supreme office created shortly after the Khitan came under the control of the Türks during the late sixth to early seventh century was initially called *Sijin* 俟斤 and the Dahe must have been an alternative name for the former title meaning “great *mofuhe* (*dahe*)”. Jennifer Holmgren, “Yeh-lü, Yao-lien and Ta-ho,”: 41-7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

As for the name of the second ruling clan of the Khitan confederation, the Yaolian, it is even more difficult than the case of the Dahe, if not impossible, to verify the statement of the *Liaoshi* that it was the name of a specific clan that produced nine confederation leaders in succession from 740s to the beginning of the tenth century. Little information on the Khitan activities during this period can be found in Chinese histories and the *Liaoshi*, except that they were under Uighur control sometime around 750 to 842, when the Uighur empire collapsed.⁹ Only four khaghans out of a total nine from the Yaolian clan can be identified with some degree of certainty in the historical context.¹⁰ Zuwu Khaghan 阻午可汗 is said to have accepted Tang suzerainty in 745 when the Tang court granted him the title of vassal king, which he renounced only a few months later to offer allegiance to the Uighurs.¹¹ As the Uighur empire disintegrated in 842, a Khitan leader named Qushu contacted the Tang court requesting to be formally reinstated as Tang vassal. Their request was granted. After Qushu, two more khaghans, Bala 巴剌 and Hedejin 痕德董, respectively, ruled the Khitan during the second half of the ninth century until Yelü Abaoji took over the leadership in 907. Hedejin was the last khaghan of the confederation from the Yaolian clan.

⁹ Twitchett and Tietze, “The Liao,” 50.

¹⁰ Jennifer Holmgren, “Yeh-lü, Yao-lien and Ta-ho”, 57.

¹¹ He is referred to with his Chinese name, Li Huaixiu or Li Huaijie 李懷節, in Tang histories and other Chinese sources. With his enfeoffment, he also received the Tang imperial surname and a Tang royal clanswoman to marry whom he killed in the same year. In 751, the Tang sent out a punitive military campaign headed by An Lushan, then Fanyang (modern Beijing) Governor-General, but failed to defeat the Khitan forces in their initial attack. An Lushan’s second invasion carried out four years later turned out to be more successful and inflicted a heavy loss on the Khitan side. It appears that Li Huaixiu lost his leadership position after this incident. See Twitchett and Tietzer, 49-50; Jennifer Holmgren, “Yeh-lü, Yao-lien”, 56; LS 63: 955-6.

Both the *Liaoshi* and Tang histories (*Tangshu* 唐書) state that Bala and Hendejin were relations.¹² However, there is no indication that they were related to any of the seven previous Yaolian rulers in the list provided in the *Liaoshi*. Moreover, the name Yaolian does not appear in two versions of Tang histories (*Tangshu* 唐書), compiled in 945 and in 1060, and can only be found in the sources compiled after the mid-eleventh century, including the *Liaoshi*.¹³ This challenges the validity of the *Liaoshi* which states a certain clan named Yaolian dominated the leadership office for over a hundred fifty years. It is possible that the lineage from which Bala and Hendejin khaghans came was playing the leading role in the confederation during the last few decades of the ninth century but we cannot stretch the timeline of its rule beyond the mid-ninth century without further textual evidence. Although the *Liaoshi* presents the names of the nine Yaolian khaghans as if they were the only rulers who had successively governed the confederation from the mid-eighth to the early tenth century, it is highly doubtful that such description reflects the reality.

The *Old History of Five Dynasties* and the Tang histories contravene the *Liaoshi* on how the pre-dynastic leadership transfer at the confederation level occurred. They record that the eight tribal chieftains elected one of them as the supreme leader on a triennial basis. The position was neither subject to hereditary succession by a single

¹² XTS 219: 6172.

¹³ The earliest source in which the name Yaolian appears is *Luting zazhi* 虜庭雜紀 compiled during the mid-eleventh century. See Jennifer Holmgren, “Yeh-lü, Yao-lien”, 56, foot note no. 74; ZT 266: 8677.

lineage nor permanent.¹⁴ Postmortem succession sometimes occurred, but it was not the norm. All these make it difficult for us to accept that the list of the Yaolian rulers in the *Liaoshi* enumerated all the rulers from the 730s to 907.¹⁵

It appears that the Liao historians modified and exaggerated the sources in order to make the pattern of pre-dynastic succession fit the Chinese model of imperial succession. They were clearly motivated by a political agenda to legitimize the permanent leadership of Abaoji and his descendants in the Khitan society where life-long tenure and the monopoly of power through lineal succession were still foreign. In other words, the genealogies of the leaders from the Dahe and Yaolian were inserted in the *Liaoshi* to create a semblance that the pre-dynastic Khitan had already been governed by the two ruling clans for a lengthy period of time and that Abaoji did not impose on the Khitan the new system of hereditary monarchy but simply inherited it.

Although the names of Dahe and Yaolian do not refer to the clans in the Chinese sense, it is possible that they refer to some sort of kin groups that had assumed a leading role in the Khitan tribes as the sources described. Indeed, the *Liaoshi* speaks of tribes (*bu* 部, *buzu* 部族 and *buluo* 部落) with or without “lineages” or “clans” (*shizu* 氏族 or *zu*

¹⁴ Xue Juzheng, ed., *Jiu Wudaishi* (JWDS), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 137:1828; XTS 219: 6172-3. *Xin Wudaishi* (*New History of Five Dynasty*) does not specify the leadership tenure as three years but states that the incumbent ruler was subject to be replaced if he had been in power too long or if a natural calamity or a serious famine struck the community. See Ouyang Xiu, ed., *Xin wudai shi* (*XWDS*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 72: 886. For further discussion on the Khitan leadership succession, see Chen Shu, “Lun Qidan zhi xuanhandahui yu diwei jicheng”, reprinted in Yang Jialuo, ed., *Liaoshi Huibian* (Taipei: Dingwen Shuju, 1972), Vol. 8, 418-42. See also Jennifer Holmgren, “Yeh-lü, Yao-lien and Ta-ho”, 37-81. See also Jennifer Holmgren, “Marriage, Kinship and Succession under the Ch’i-tan rulers of the Liao dynasty (907-1125)”, *T’oung Pao* 72 (1986): 45-91.

¹⁵ Jennifer Holmgren, “Yeh-lü, Yaolian”, 56-63.

族).¹⁶ During the pre-dynastic times a tribe (*bu*) was the largest political unit below the level of confederation and it primarily consisted of an extended kin group (*zu*) whose members shared the common residence and the joint responsibility for defense. If the Chinese term *zu* used in the context of the Khitan society does not represent exactly the same concept of descent group or clan of the Chinese, what did it refer to? To the Chinese, *zu* meant a descent group that consists of agnates who believe that they have descended from the common paternal ancestor. The members of a *zu* share the same surname and cannot marry each other.¹⁷ Many scholars agree that such a kin group was unlikely to have been a basic constituent of the Khitan society, while admitting that it was probably patriarchal (a senior male is the head of the household), patrilineal (descent groups being organized by the genealogical link of the male line from father to son to grandson) and patrilocal (women move into the household of their husbands upon marriage). They came to the conclusion largely based upon the observation on the social institutions of other Steppe peoples, including the Türks and Uighurs, who are said to have had a rigid patriarchal structure. Considering that the Khitan were under their control in succession from the seventh to the mid-ninth century, although not without

¹⁶ LS 32: 377.

¹⁷ I borrowed the definitions of kin from Patricia B. Ebrey and James Watson, as well as from Karl Wittfogel. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and James L. Watson, ed., *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000-1940*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1986), 5-9; Wittfogel and Feng, 47.

intervals, it seems entirely reasonable to speculate that their impact on the socio-political development of the Khitan was significant.¹⁸

Karl Wittfogel believed that the Khitans had considered themselves as members of an exogamous patrilineal descent group only for a certain number of generations, possibly nine. In other words, two individuals removed from the common paternal ancestor for nine generations or longer would consider themselves unrelated, therefore, they could marry each other. He cited the significant role that the number nine played in the pre-dynastic Khitan history and the tribal rituals as basis of his hypothesis that a Khitan descent group broke off after nine generations. There is, however, no direct textual evidence.¹⁹ Jennifer Holmgren by and large agrees with Wittfogel in that *zu* for the Khitans represented an exogamous kin group but she speculated that the Khitan traced their descent only up to five consecutive generations.²⁰

The fact that the *Liaoshi* identifies the paternal ancestors of the dynastic founder up to the eighth generation, along with those of his wife for five generations, seems to support the argument that the pre-dynastic Khitan followed the principles of patrilineality. The *Liaoshi* also claims that the Khitan marriages were contracted in accordance with the rule of clan exogamy as early as the times of Abaoji's great-great grandfather, Noulisi

¹⁸ See Denis Sinor, "The establishment and dissolution of the Türk empire" and Colin Mackerras, "The Uighurs" in the *Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, ed. Denis Sinor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 285-342. See also Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 131-157.

¹⁹ For instance, Karl Wittfogel argues that there were nine generations of the Yaolian khaghans before Abaoji assumed the confederation leadership. Moreover, during the dynastic period, the Khitan imperial investiture ceremony required nine men to be dressed alike and to perform the ceremony together with the newly enthroned emperor. See Wittfogel and Feng, 204-5.

²⁰ Jennifer Holmgren, "Yeh-lü, Yao-lien", 40-1 and 68. However she accepted the theory of Karl Wittfogel that ninth generation was cut-off limit for a Khitan lineage before it broke into several independent lineages in her other article. See "Marriage, Kinship and Succession", 44.

(later canonized as Suzu 肅祖), who had promulgated its propriety.²¹ We should keep it in mind, however, that the genealogy of the Liao imperial house of the pre-dynastic era, along with the accounts on the various achievements of Abaoji's ancestors in the *Liaoshi*, is not to be taken literally, for it includes anachronism and fabrications, when examined closely.

For instance, according to the *Liaoshi*, Nili 泥禮 was the progenitor of the Yelü clan.²² He is said to have been affiliated with the faction headed by Ketuyu 可突于, a well-known leader of the Khitan confederation in the 730s.²³ Then the *Liaoshi* claims that Nili's great-grandson, Suzu (Abaoji's great-great grandfather), participated in the battle against invading Tang army led by An Lushan 安祿山 in 751. These dates make it almost impossible that Nili and Suzu were three generations removed from each other, even if we accepted the fact that they had been really related.²⁴ There is little doubt that the editors of the *Liaoshi* modified and sometimes fabricated the sources available to them in order to make the genealogy of the Liao imperial house fit the principles of the patrilineality of the Chinese dynasties. We will return to this issue later for further

²¹ LS 2: 24; LS 63: 955-6; LS 71: 1198.

²² A set of different Chinese characters with the same sound, Nili 涅里, or an alternative name, Yali 雅里, were used to refer to the same figure in the other chapter of the *Liaoshi*. See LS 2: 24; LS 32: 377-380.

²³ Ketuyu is said to have been a minister (Yaguan 衙官) serving under the Dahe rulers but it appears that he was the de facto ruler of the Khitan from 718 to 734, if not earlier, considering the fact that he could enthrone and depose five different Khitan kings from the Dahe (Li) clan at will. His rule ended when he was murdered by a certain Guozhe 過折, who in turn was killed in the following year by a member of Ketuyu's clique, Nili, aforementioned progenitor of the Yelü clan. See LS 63: 955. For the details of the events, see Jennifer Holmgren, "Yeh-lü, Yao-lien", 53-68. She is skeptical about the *Liaoshi* claims on Nili being the progenitor of the Yelü clan.

²⁴ *Ibid.*,

discussion. The reality of their kinship structure during the pre-and early dynastic period was probably far from what the *Liaoshi* portrays.

Many Inner and North Asiatic pastoralists in general did not have a clear conceptualization of kin. This was natural considering their fluid lifestyle and economic system marked by seasonal migrations in the pursuit of fresh pastureland and hunting ground with no permanent settlements. Under such conditions, it was almost impossible for the members of a descent group to keep track of their ancestry beyond a certain number of generations. At some point a group would break up to generate a new set of separate and independent units. As a result, the Inner and North Asiatic peoples, historically known to us, all developed a very loose and flexible concept of kinship. The Khitan were no exception. Their ideas of kin were probably quite elastic and inclusive by considering “anyone who was related to one through either parent or an affine” as kin, without emphasizing on the paternal links too much.²⁵ In this sense, it bears a considerable similarity to that of their eastern neighbor, the people of Koryŏ 高麗 (918-1392). In the socio-political world of a Koryŏ aristocrat, all of his kin were equally important no matter how they were related to him, by blood or marriage. The fact that the Koryŏ aristocrats often recruited their political allies among their affines or matrilineal kin, rather than paternal relatives, confirms the multilateral nature of their perception of kin.²⁶ The Liao dynastic founder also relied heavily on the military support

²⁵ Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea; A study of Society and Ideology*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 38-40. She gives the example of Yi Cha-gyŏm 李資謙 (d.1126), whose faction was largely comprised of his maternal relatives and affines.

of his brothers-in-law in removing his political rivals to elevate himself to the position of the permanent Khitan leader. His numerous brothers and paternal uncles played much less conspicuous roles in the process.

Khitan Principles of Inheritance and Succession

As far as the transfer of the Khitan leadership is concerned, it seems the principle of patrilineality did not play a significant role in the process of selecting the next leader on both tribal and confederation levels. Primogeniture was not a consideration either, for brothers and nephews of the previous ruler were often chosen to succeed the position. All of the direct descendants and collaterals were considered equally legitimate and qualified candidates, as shown in the pattern of confederation leadership transfer between the members of the Dahe (Li) clan during the seventh and eighth century.²⁷ The chieftainship (Yilijin 夷離堇) of the Yila tribe 迭刺部 seems to have been transmitted according to the same principle at least during the period described in the *Liaoshi* from Abaoji's great-great grandfather, Suzu, to Abaoji who assumed the position in 901.²⁸ Even after the dynastic founder adopted clan names along with other Chinese institutions, such as lineal inheritance and primogeniture, by announcing his eldest son, Bei 倍 (900-

²⁷ For example, the supposed first leader of the Khitan confederation, Mohui 摩會, active in 630s, appears to have had no relations to his successor, Kuge, who formally accepted the Tang suzerainty in 648. Abugu 阿不固 became the supreme leader in 659. The sources do not mention that he was related to the previous ruler, Kuge. Within the Dahe (Li) family, the Tang title of vassal king was often transferred from uncles to nephews or cousins. When Li Jinzhong 李盡忠, one of Kuge's grandsons, died in 696, the title of king was claimed by his cousin Li Shihuo 李失活, who was succeeded by his younger brother, Suogu 娑固, from 716 to 730s. See LS 63: 952-5; Jennifer Holmgren, "Yeh-lü, Yao-lien", 37-55.

²⁸ See Wittfogel and Feng, 399-400.

37)²⁹, as heir apparent, the Khitan imperial succession was not to be in accordance with the Chinese ideals for another seventy years or so by vacillating between the two lineages descended from of his eldest and the second son until the fifth emperor, Jingzong (r. 969-982), grandson of Bei, ascended the throne. The first Liao emperor who ascended the throne as the eldest son of the previous ruler was, Shengzong, Jingzong's successor.³⁰

While women were automatically excluded from the pool of candidates for the leadership succession, they were given an important political role of bringing tribes together through marriage. Reciprocal marriage was particularly favored by many peoples of Inner Asia as a means to solidify the inter-tribal alliance.³¹ The union of Abaoji and his wife, Empress Chunqin, fit this pattern precisely. Considering that his wife's mother was in fact his paternal aunt (his father's sister), we can conclude that the marriage alliance between the two clans went farther back than the generation of Abaoji. There is little doubt that Abaoji's clan and the Yila tribe were benefited greatly from the alliance, for the Yila rose rapidly to become the most powerful tribe during the last decade of the ninth century. Numerous military victories against their neighboring tribes during this period recorded in the *Liaoshi* demonstrate the tremendous boost of the military capability of the Yila tribe. Both of Abaoji's brothers-in-law, who are said to have been superb warriors, began assisting him in the battlefields by this time.

²⁹ See LS 64: 973-4.

³⁰ Wittfogel and Feng, 402-3; Yao Cungwu, "Qidan Junwei jicheng wenti fenxi", in Yao Cungwu, *Dongbeishi luncong* (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1968), vol. 1, 252-3.

³¹ Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 26-7.

The reciprocal marriage between the two clans continued to be upheld after the establishment of the dynasty.³² The family of Empress Chunqin, later known as the Xiao clan, successfully secured an exclusive and permanent lien on providing principal wives for the imperial clansmen, including emperors. In such a system, an imperial daughter would marry one of her maternal relatives (of the Xiao clan) and the female offspring from that union would marry back into the imperial clan. Generations later, it would generate a very dense network of kinship in which the paternal and maternal lines became so blurred that they were no longer distinguishable from one another.³³ The members of these two ruling clans monopolized the access to the political power and the vast majority of the wealth of the empire. For example, the two highest offices in the Liao administration, prime ministers at Northern and Southern Divisions, were reserved for them through their hereditary claims, since Taizu had set up the precedent.³⁴ Therefore, having a certified pedigree was the most essential qualification for a Khitan individual who had aspirations for a prominent political career. Ancestry of both of his parents was considered, not just the paternal side.

The exalted status and prerogatives of the Khitan aristocratic clans were inherited by their female members as well as their male ones. That women could retain and transmit them onto their offspring in the same manner as their Koryŏ counterparts did is

³² LS 3: 36.

³³ Martina Deuchler, 57-65; Jennifer Holmgren, "Imperial Marriage in the Native Chinese and Non-Han State, Han to Ming", *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, eds. Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, (Berkeley: University of California), 80-4.

³⁴ The Liao adopted a dual administrative structure which consisted of Northern and Southern Divisions. Northern Division was in charge of governing the tribal population including the Khitans who mainly resided in the north, while the Southern Division administered the sedentary regions occupied mostly by Chinese and Bohai in the south. See LS 45: 685-690; Wittfogel and Feng, 434-6 and 472-5.

well attested in the cases involved the hereditary succession by protection privilege (*yin* 蔭).³⁵ In 1027, during the reign of Shengzong, an edict was issued prescribing that the social status of the offspring of the noble lineages and households by concubines be determined according to that of their mothers.³⁶ The noble lineages here refer to the two branches of the imperial clan and two lineages of the Xiao clan.³⁷ Another edict followed two years later which proclaimed that a son of a concubine was not eligible to claim the hereditary succession to office, even if he had already been considered a free man. In the same month and the year, a third edict was issued to reiterate basically the same principle and to provide more specific guidelines on qualifications for certain offices. Men of low social standing or those born to concubines were excluded from holding the offices at the administration in charge of the four noble lineages cited above.³⁸ An actual case from Daozong's reign testifies that such policies were in reality enforced and that women's social status exerted a profound impact on their children's career in the Liao officialdom. An edict was issued in 1077 that two brothers of Yelü Yixin 耶律乙辛 (d. 1083)³⁹, Northern Military Commissioner at the time, were entitled to receive the hereditary claims to the offices of Northern and Southern Military Commissioner. It further

³⁵ Martina Deuchler, 45-56.

³⁶ Wittfogel and Feng, 233; LS 17: 201.

³⁷ The imperial clan consisted of the two branches (divisions) of Horizontal Tent 橫帳, the lineage descended from Taizu, and Three Patriarchal Households 三父房, the lineages of Taizu's two paternal uncles and his brothers. Only Taizu's line had prerogative to the imperial succession, therefore, the lineages of the Three Patriarchal Households held more of an honorary position. See Wittfogel and Feng, 84, 86, and 227. See also LS 33: 383-4; LS 64: 961-972.

³⁸ *Ibid.*; LS 17: 203.

³⁹ For his biography, see LS 110:1483-6.

specified that his half-brothers born from a different wife of Yixin's father to less illustrious office of Yilijin.⁴⁰

Shengzong was the first emperor who began to show a keen interest in keeping genealogical records in order to distinguish the offspring by principal wives from those by the lesser wives.⁴¹ In his court, a debate on the subject was held.⁴² He also proclaimed a number of new laws and regulations on marriage and on the relationship between different social classes. In 1019, it was decreed that two noble lineages of the imperial clan were forbidden to intermarry with less distinguished lineages and that all the marriages were henceforth to be reported to the throne for approval prior to their betrothal.⁴³ What Shengzong intended to accomplish eventually by introducing such laws and edicts is clear. He wished to preserve the existing social hierarchy and protect the prerogatives of the two ruling clans, particularly those of the Xiao clan.

Then why was Shengzong so concerned with in such matters? There is little question that the Khitan society was stratified since the early dynastic period. Marriage and inheritance must have been regulated according to their customary laws. Particularly, the exclusive marriage exchange between the imperial and the consort clans had been established during the reign of the first emperor and remained effective since. Therefore, Shengzong did not introduce drastically new social institutions but that he deemed it necessary to redefine and clarify the qualifications of the ruling class to restrict the

⁴⁰ LS 23:279.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; LS 80:1281.

⁴² The Khitan officials such as Yelü Shiliang 耶律世良 and Xiao Po 蕭朴 are said to have submitted excellent memorials on the subject, which impressed the emperor. See Wittfogel and Feng, 230 and 233. See Xiao Po's biography in LS 80: 1277-8 and Yelü Shiliang's in LS 94:1385-6.

⁴³ Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship and Succession", 74-5.

membership to the Khitans of the Yelü and Xiao descent only. It is possible that by the time of Shengzong's reign, the Chinese system of concubinage was well established in the Khitan society and many Khitan aristocrats kept multiple concubines of different ethnic origins. More wives naturally resulted in more numerous offspring. While the number of male descendants in each aristocratic household increased, the offices available at the Liao administration remained relatively steady. Under the circumstances, Shengzong perhaps thought it was imperative to introduce a certain set of rules according to which the eligibility of an individual to serve at the high level of the administration could be evaluated and determined. Therefore, his policies betray his desire, probably shared by other Khitan nobles, to keep the political power in the hands of the small number of the Khitan aristocrats of Yelü and Xiao descent and out of the reach of the conquered population.

However, it was not impossible for people of non-Xiao and non-Yelü origins to penetrate into the enclosed circle of the Khitan aristocracy. As mentioned above, the Khitan attitude towards kinship was originally flexible and it remained so after the establishment of the dynasty in the sense that the membership of a clan was not strictly bound by consanguinity. Outsiders could be incorporated into a kin group on special occasions. Fictive kinship was one of the distinctive characteristics of the kin structure widely shared by many peoples of the Inner Asian Steppes.⁴⁴ It was not uncommon for a Mongol or Xianbei retainer to renounce his own heritage to become a member of his

⁴⁴ Thomas Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 24-8.

patron's clan to swear his loyalty.⁴⁵ Two individuals of equal political and social standing also contracted fictive kin relationship for the purpose of forging an alliance, as young Abaoji did as Commander-in-chief of the Khitan confederation force. In 905 he successfully sealed a peace negotiation with his former rival, Li Keyong 李克用(856-908), the famous governor-general of Hedong 河東 Province (modern Shanxi) by swearing brotherhood with the latter in 905.⁴⁶

The *Liaoshi* lists a number of the Khitan individuals with either Yelü or Xiao name who in fact had no consanguineous relations to the members of the respective clan. Their biographies often omit the details of the circumstances under which they acquired their clan names. That is why the biography of a prominent Chinese official, Han Derang 韓德讓(941-1011), is extremely useful to us for it describes how the imperial clan name was conferred upon him. He was one of the most powerful officials during the reigns of Jingzong and Shengzong and perhaps the most successful Chinese official throughout the whole dynastic period. He rose to the pinnacle of power when he was appointed as Northern Prime Minister and Northern Military Commissioner during the regency of the formidable mother of Shengzong, Empress Ruizhi, who particularly favored him. In 1004, Shengzong ordered his name to be changed to Yelü to honor his time-honored

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; Albert Dien, "Bestowal of Surnames under the Western Wei-Northern Chou: A case of Counter-Acculturation", *T'oung Pao* 63 (1977):137-77. During the Western Wei 西魏-Northern Zhou Dynasty 北周(538-581), the Xianbei 鮮卑(Tuoba 拓跋) rulers ordered on a few separate occasions that all the Chinese and non-Xianbei soldiers under the command of the Xianbei generals adopt the surnames of their respective commanders.

⁴⁶ Li Keyong was of Shato-Türk descent and had been ruling the Hedong area (capital Taiyuan) since 883. His son, Li Cunxu (885-926), canonized as Zhangzong (r. 923-6), established the Later Tang dynasty (923-936) in 923. See Wittfogel and Feng, 239; Twitchett and Tietze, 53-58; LS 1: 2; JWDS 137:1828; ZT 266: 8676-9.

service to the state, especially during the critical phase of the Song war.⁴⁷ Moreover, his clan was awarded with the privilege to intermarry with the consort clan henceforth.⁴⁸ His case demonstrates that the Liao emperors occasionally bestowed their clan name upon extraordinarily meritorious civil and military officials as a reward.

On the other hand, the descendants of the previous ruling clan, Yaolian, and non-Khitans nobles, such as the rulers of subjugated Xi 奚 tribes, also received the honorific membership to the imperial clan. Yelü Amoli, 耶律阿沒里, a scion of Zhaogu Khaghan 嘲古可汗 from the Yaolian clan, is a good example of such cases.⁴⁹ Bestowing a surname was by no means restricted to the imperial clan. Some officials obtained the honorific membership of the consort clan by marriage. Xiao Hezhuo 蕭合卓 from the Tulubu 突呂不 tribe, for instance, was awarded the name Xiao when one of his clanswomen was chosen as wife for one of the imperial princes.⁵⁰ Other non-Xiao individuals who were made honorific Xiao listed in the *Liaoshi* are Xiao Hendu 蕭痕篤, Xiao De 蕭德, Xiao Hanjianu 蕭韓家奴, and Xiao Guanyinnu 蕭觀音奴, to name a few.⁵¹

To summarize, on the eve of the tenth century, when Abaoji was about to emerge as the new leader of the Khitan confederation, it is said that the Khitans were organized into twenty tribes. The Khitans originally did not possess clan names. Starting in the

⁴⁷ For further information on the Song-Liao war and peace treaties, see Jing-shen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven: Studies in Sung-Liao Relations* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988), 10-25.

⁴⁸ See his biography in LS 82: 1289-91.

⁴⁹ LS 79: 1274-5.

⁵⁰ LS 81: 1286-7.

⁵¹ Wittfogel and Feng, 237-8; LS 74: 1229-1230; LS 96:1400; LS 96:1399-1400; LS 85:1314.

first half of the seventh century a few leading lineages began to use clan names that had been either imposed or bestowed on them by the powerful foreign overlords such as the Türks and the Tang dynasty, whose social structure was far more patriarchal and patrilineal. Although the majority did not have clan names, the Khitans had a concept of an extended descent group which was the basic unit of their tribal society. However, their conceptualization of kin seems to have been much more flexible than the patrilineal principles of the Chinese. While they apparently traced their ancestry through paternal line, they retained an old multilateral strategy by acknowledging one's maternal as well as affinal relatives as almost equally important as paternal kin.

After Abaoji made himself a permanent ruler of the Khitans and transformed the confederation into a hereditary monarchy, Yelü was adopted as the name for his clan and the Xiao for the clan of his wife. Having clan names was one of the prerogatives of the two ruling clans and the rest of the Khitans lived without them throughout the dynastic era. The alliance between these two clans was sustained through exclusive marriage exchange according to which the clan of the first empress had a permanent lien on providing imperial consorts. Repetitive marriages of the two clans eventually generated very compact kinship network in which all the members were related to each other by blood or by marriage or, more often, by both. Because of such overlapping ties between the members, they must have had a strong bond and sense of cohesiveness as a kin group.⁵²

⁵² Martina Deuchler, 65.

CHAPTER 2: THE FORMATION OF THE IMPERIAL CONSORT CLAN, THE XIAO

Introduction

So far we have learned that the Khitan originally did not have the same conceptualization of a clan or kin group as the Chinese and that the Chinese style clan names were adopted only after the establishment of the Liao dynasty. Only two ruling clans, the imperial clan and their permanent marriage partner, the Xiao clan, had the prerogative of having clan names. Then who were the Xiao clan and how did they successfully manage to establish themselves as the sole clan that could supply all imperial wives? The origin and structure of the imperial consort clan is one of the most controversial problems in the field of the Liao history, on which many experts have debated and found no little agreement. In this chapter, I will first reiterate all the relevant passages found in the *Liaoshi* on the formation of the Xiao clan and attempt to interpret them to come up with the most logical and convincing answers to the questions, raised above.

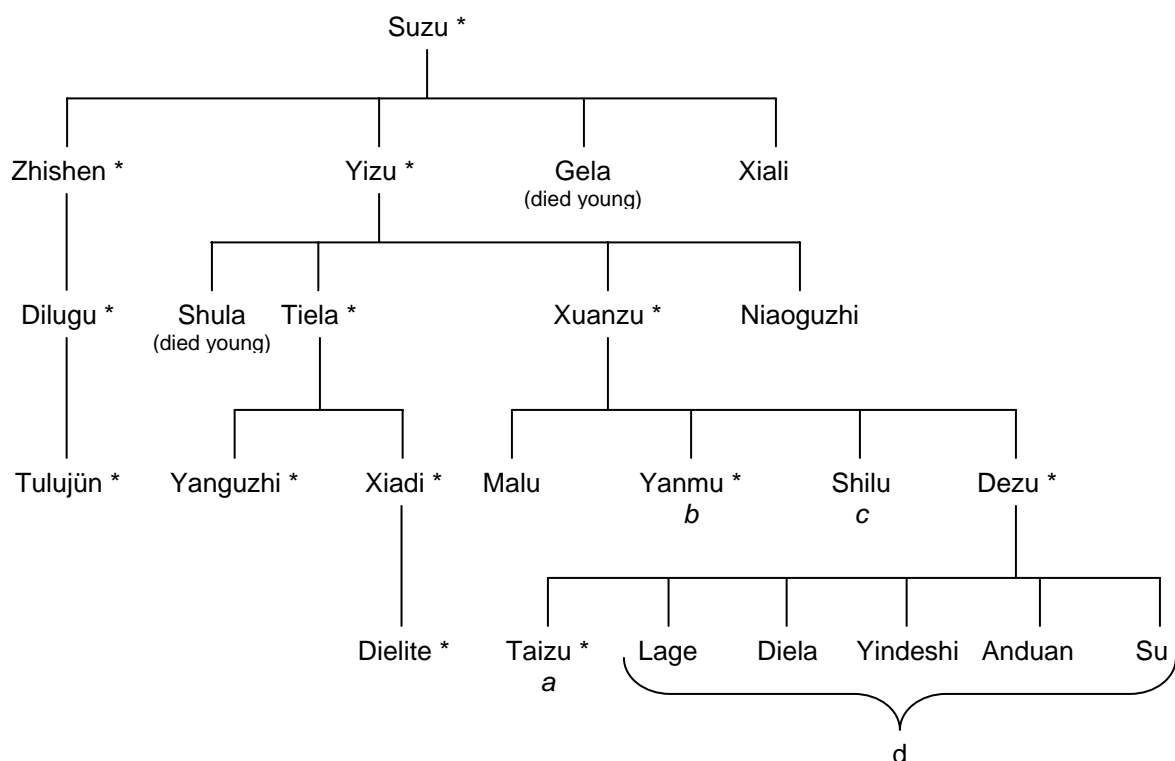
The Structure of the Xiao Clan

While the structure of the imperial clan is explained in a straightforward manner in the *Liaoshi*, that of the consort clan has been a frequent subject of debate among the scholars for the last few decades due to its inconsistent and cryptic descriptions, which resulted in various interpretations. The imperial clan was largely divided into two divisions (*yuan* 院) and four branches or tents (*zhang* 帳). Two Divisions, namely Five and Six

Divisions, were established to honor the lineages of more remote paternal relatives of Taizu. Five Divisions consisted of descendants of the eldest son of Suzu, Abaoji's great-great grandfather, while those derived from his three younger sons, including Yizu, Abaoji's great grandfather, constituted Six Divisions. Four Tents, otherwise known as Four Leading Lineages of the empire, can be divided into Three Patriarchal Households (*sanfufang* 三父房) and Horizontal Tent (*Hengzhang* 橫帳), the former of which refers to the lineages of Taizu's paternal uncles and brother and the latter the lineage directly descended from Abaoji.¹ Although all the lineages of the imperial clan were equally honored, in reality only Horizontal Tent was entitled to produce imperial successors.² Its structure is shown in the diagram below.

¹ Ik-jou, Choi, "Liao-eu jibae se-ryuk-eu gu-jo-wa je-ui-gye-seung-e dae-ha-yeo. 遼의 支配勢力의 構造와 帝位繼承에 對하여." [On the structure of the Liao ruling class and the imperial succession] *Dong-yang sahak yeon-gu* 5 (1971):43-98, particularly 46-7; Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 50-2.

² *Ibid.*, Taizu's immediate ancestors were not bestowed the honorary imperial titles until 1052. See LS 20: 244.



*indicates Yilijin(chieftainship)

a indicates the lineage of Taizu, Horizontal Tent

b-d indicate Three Patriarchal Households

Diagram modified from Wittfogel and Feng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907-1125)*

Figure 1. The Lineages of the Liao Imperial Clan

As for the origin of the consort clan, the biography of the first empress in the *Liaoshi* unambiguously states one thing. Her paternal ancestors were Uighurs who had joined the Khitan confederation a few generations earlier.³ Her Uighur heritage is reiterated in another *Liaoshi* chapter on the geography, which describes the establishment of a prefecture named Yikun (儀坤州) on the territory where her Uighur ancestors had lived

³ LS 71: 1199.

for four generations prior to her birth.⁴ Her mother is identified as the daughter of Yundejia (later canonized as Xüanzu), grandfather of Abaoji, and younger sister of Salade (Dezu), Abaoji's father. In other words, Abaoji had married the daughter of his paternal aunt. The union between Empress Chunqin's mother and the Uighur official is the earliest marriage alliance between the two clans which can be traced with certainty. The *Liaoshi* records an episode in which Suzu, great-great grandfather of Abaoji, arranged his son (Yizu)'s marriage to a girl from the Xiao family, after proclaiming, "People of the same surname might become allies, while people with different surnames can marry each other."⁵ This account, however, is likely to have been a fabrication inserted into the *Liaoshi* by its editors in order to give the impression to the readers that pre-dynastic Khitans had observed exogamy and that the marriage alliance between the Yelü and Xiao predates the generation of Empress Chunqin's mother. Wives of Suzu and Yizu were posthumously granted with their honorary titles of Empress Zhaolie 昭烈皇后 and Zhuangjing 莊敬皇后, respectively, in 1103 by the last Liao emperor, Tianzuo 天祚(r. 1101-1125).⁶ Abaoji's mother and grandmother were honored with the imperial titles in 1052 during the reign of Xingzong.⁷ The fact that no genealogical information is provided in their biographies seems to refute the plausibility that these four women had come from the same clan or somehow related to the family of Empress

⁴ LS 37: 446-7; Wittfogel and Feng, 64.

⁵ Wittfogel and Feng, 237; LS 71: 1198.

⁶ LS 71: 1198-9.

⁷ *Ibid.*,

Chunqin.⁸ Therefore, it is entirely reasonable to hypothesize that their name Xiao was bestowed upon them together with their honorary titles as a kind of general appellation meaning “empresses” and therefore not a name.⁹

The biography of Empress Chunqin in the *Liaoshi*, however, offers a puzzling passage in which she was identified as a member of a clan named Shulu 述律氏.

Chinese sources such as *Xin Wudaishi* (新五代史) and *Qidan Guozhi* (契丹國誌) also refer to her and one of her brothers by the same name.¹⁰ The name Shulu was apparently used only in the context of the first empress and her immediate family. All the empresses and the members of the consort clan in the succeeding generations are referred to as Xiao in the *Liaoshi* and other sources. Since when did Xiao begin to be in use and how did it replace the older name Shulu? What was exactly the relationship between the family of Empress Chunqin (Shulu) and the later consort clan (Xiao)? In trying to find the answers to these questions, it is necessary to carefully contemplate the passages in the *Liaoshi* that contain pertinent information on the consort clan, although at first sight they seem to raise more questions than leading us to a satisfactory answer. By and large, there are four different accounts on the origin and the formation of the consort clan.

⁸ Only the father of Abaoji’s mother, canonized as Empress Xuanjian 宣簡皇后, is identified. He was named Tila 剔剌 and is said to have served as minister under the Yaolian Khaghans. *Ibid.*,

⁹ Wittfogel and Feng, 206; Jennifer Holmgren, “Marriage, Kinship”, 48; Ik-jou Choi. Ik-jou Choi speculated that these four empresses came from the Yishi tribe.

¹⁰ XWDS 72:886: *Qidan guozhi*,13:1a

(i) The prologue (序文) of the *Liaoshi* chapter on the biographies of the Imperial Consorts (后妃傳) reads as follows;

后族唯乙室, 拔里氏, 而世任其國事. 太祖慕漢高皇帝,
故耶 兼稱 氏, 以乙室, 拔里比蕭相國, 遂爲蕭氏.

The consort clan only had two lineages of Yishi and Bali and they were in charge of the state affairs for generations. Taizu (Abaoji) admired Emperor Gao of the Han Dynasty (Liu Bang, reigned r. 202-195 B.C.), therefore the Yelü clan was also referred to with the name Liu and the Yishi and Bali were subsequently called the Xiao for they were comparable to the family of Chancellor Xiao (Xiao He).¹¹

(ii) A similar account with a slight deviation can be found in the chapter on the Imperial Consort Clan (外戚表).

契丹外戚, 其先曰二審密氏; 曰拔里, 曰乙室已. 至遼太祖, 娶述律氏.
述律, 本回纥 于思之後.....由是拔里, 乙室已, 述律三族皆爲蕭姓.
拔里二房, 曰大父, 少父; 乙室已亦二房, 曰大翁, 小翁;
世宗以舅氏塔列葛爲國舅別部.....聖宗合拔里, 乙室已二國舅帳爲一,
與別部爲二. 此遼外戚之始末也.

The ancestors of the Khitan imperial consort clan were two Shenmi lineages; one was called Bali and the other Yishisi. Reaching to the time of (Liao) Taizu, he took a Shulu as his wife, who was a descendent of a Uighur, Nousi....from then on, all the three lineages, Bali, Yishisi and Shulu, were referred to with the clan name Xiao. There were two branches within the Bali lineages called Senior and Junior Patriarchal Households, respectively. Yishisi was also divided into two branches of Senior Elder and Junior Elder Households. Shizong established the lineage of his maternal uncle, Taliege, as a separate division of the imperial consort clan.....Shengzong combined the two lineages of Bali and Yishisi to make one (lineage of Imperial Maternal Uncles). With the Independent Division (of Imperial Maternal Uncles) therefore, there were

¹¹ LS 71: 1198.

two lineages (of the consort clan). This is the beginning and the end of the Liao imperial consort clans.¹²

(iii) The annals of Taizong's reign (太宗本紀) contains the following passage,

天贊十年 夏四月, 丙戌, 皇太后父族及母前夫之族二帳并爲國舅, 以蕭緬思爲尙父領之.¹³

On the Bingxu day of the fourth month in the tenth year of the Tianzan era (935), (Taizong) established the two lineages, one of which was the family of the empress-dowager (Chunqin)'s father and the other was that of her mother's former husband, as the Tent of Imperial Maternal Uncles. Xiao Miansi was appointed to be in charge (of the administration) as Venerable Patriarch.

(iv) The last relevant passage appears in the chapter on the Numerous Administrative Offices (百官志) as follows,

大國舅司. 掌國舅乙室已, 拔里二帳之事. 太宗天顯十年, 合皇太后二帳爲國舅司; 聖宗開奉三年, 又併乙室已, 拔里二司爲一帳.

The Office of the Grand Imperial Maternal Uncles oversaw the affairs of the two tents of Yishisi and Bali. In the tenth year of the Tianxian era (935), Taizong united two tents of the empress dowager to be placed under the Office of Imperial Maternal Uncles; in the third year of the Kaifeng era, under the reign of Shengzong, two branches of Yishisi and Bali were again combined to become one tent.¹⁴

Naturally, such enigmatic and complicated descriptions of the consort clan prompted many scholars of the Liao history to come up with various hypotheses of their own. Tsuda Sōkichī and Hashiguchi Kaneo, two eminent Japanese historians, believed that Bali refers to the lineage of Empress Chunqin's father, whose two branches, Senior

¹² LS 67: 1027.

¹³ LS 3: 36.

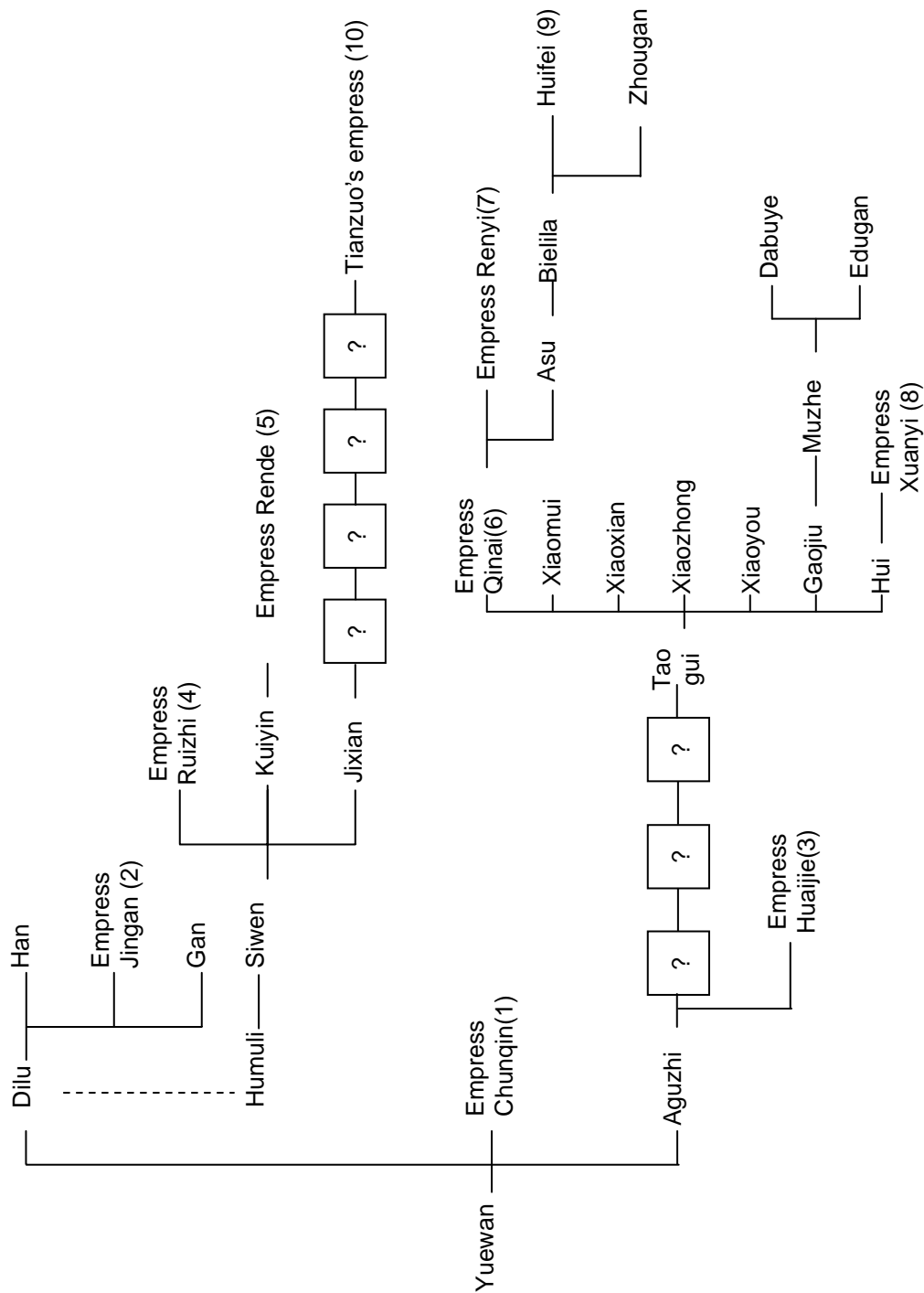
¹⁴ LS 45: 713-4; Wittfogel and Feng, 478-9.

and Junior Patriarchal Tents, represented the descendants derived from the older and younger brother of Empress Chunqin, respectively. They further argued that older brother of the empress, Xiao Dilu, was not born by the same father as her and her younger brother, Xiao Aguzhi.¹⁵ By their account, Dilu was the son of Empress Chunqin's mother's former husband. The passage from the annals of the Taizong's reign cited above unambiguously suggests that her mother had been married to someone else prior to her union with the empress' biological father of Uighur descent. They cited the biographies to support their argument in which a Uighur named Nousi is identified as the empress' great-great grandfather and a certain Humuli as that of Xiao Dilu, her older brother.¹⁶ Humuli is said to have served as a Khitan envoy to the Tang court under the Yaolian khaghans. Considering that their names and titles exhibit no similarities, it seems fair to consider Humuli and Nousi as two entirely different individuals. Moreover, there is no mention of Xiao Dilu having a Uighur heritage in his biography, to the contrary of the case of his sister.¹⁷ In the light of such textual examination the argument that Xiao Dilu was half-brother to Empress Chunqin and the younger brother, Aguzhi, appears solid. Hashiguchi further speculated that the lineage of Shizong's mother, Empress Rouzhen, otherwise known as Third Imperial Maternal Uncles, in fact Yishisi. The following chart summarizes this categorization of the consort clan

¹⁵ Hashiguchi Kaneo 橋口兼夫, "Ryōdai kokkyū-chō ni tsuite [On the Liao Imperial Consort Clan]", *Shigaku zasshi*, 50: 2-3 (1939):158-164 and 342-5. Otagi Matsuo, *Kittan kodai shi no kenkyū*, (Kyoto: Toyoshi kenkyūkai, 1959), 77-78.

¹⁶ LS 71:1199; LS 73:1222-3.

¹⁷ Ik-jou Choi therefore speculated that Dilu's paternal ancestry was Khitan, not Uighur. See Ik-jou Choi, 51. However, Jennifer Holmgren suggested the possibility that Chunqin's mother married consecutively two men from the same family following the common steppe custom of levirate. See Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 62-3.



Numbers in parentheses indicate the order of generation.
 Hashiguchi Kaneo, "Ryodai kokkyu-cho ni tsuite"

Figure 2. The Structure of the Liao Imperial Consort Clan, the Xiao

Karl Wittfogel agreed with Hashiguchi Kaneo that the two branches of the Bali lineage represented the lineal descendants of Xiao Dilu and Aguzhi. However, he believed that all three children had been fathered by the second husband of Empress Chunqin's mother, who is known to have been of Uighur descent. Therefore, he concluded that Bali referred to the lineage of the father of Empress Chunqin and her brothers, while Yishisi referred to that of the former husband of the empress' mother, whose identity is not clearly revealed in the sources.¹ To help clarify, the diagram of the consort clan drawn by Karl Wittfogel is provided below.²

Adapted from Wittfogel and Feng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*

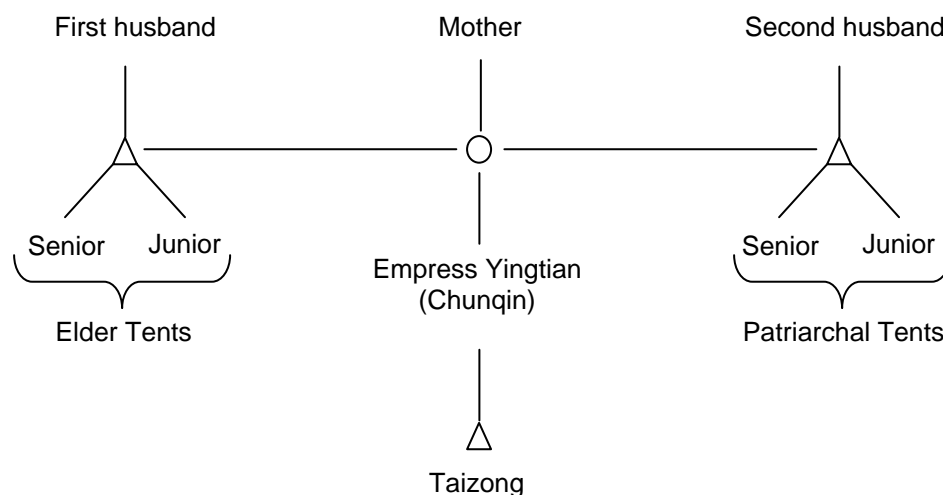


Figure 3. The Lineages of Imperial Maternal Uncles

¹ Jennifer Holmgren follows Karl Wittfogel's categorization of the consort clan and identifies Yishisi as the lineage of Empress Chunqin's mother's former husband and Bali as that of her own father's. See Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 56.

² See Wittfogel and Feng, 238.

Choi Ik-jou, on the other hand, did not agree with Hashiguchi and Otagi Matsuo that the descendants of Xiao Dliu and Aguzhi constituted two branches of the Bali lineage, although he accepted their suggestion that the two brothers of Empress Chunqin did not share a common paternal ancestry.³ For this reason, Choi argues that it is unlikely that they would have belonged to the same lineage of Bali. He speculates that Yishisi was the lineage of Xiao Dilu's father, the first husband of Empress Chunqin's mother, while Bali was the lineage of the biological father of the empress and her younger brother, Xiao Aguzhi. According to Choi, the Yishisi lineage must have been a leading lineage that dominated the leadership of the Yishi tribe for many generations prior to their submission to Abaoji's Yila tribe.⁴ He also thought it possible that the lineage of Shizong's mother, Third Imperial Maternal Uncles, was remotely related to the Yishisi lineage.

Notwithstanding the disagreements among the scholars on the details of the constitution of the consort clan Xiao described in the *Liaoshi*, there are a few indisputable points that are generally agreed upon in the hypotheses discussed above. First, the natal family of the first empress was originally referred to as Shulu and her paternal ancestry was clearly Uighur. Secondly, mother of Empress Chunqin, who had come from the clan of Abaoji, had been married to someone else prior to her union with the Uighur official, who was Empress Chunqin's biological father. The name Xiao first appeared sometime later in the reign of Taizong. It was also during his reign that the lineages of two brothers

³ Ik-jou Choi, 51-6.

⁴ Wittfogel and Feng, 87.

of his mother, Empress Chunqin, were ordered henceforth to be honored as Imperial Maternal Uncles. This act was a formal acknowledgement of the exclusive claims bestowed on the family of Empress Chunqin to provide the imperial consorts permanently. Except for Muzong's wife, whose genealogical position is impossible to identify, all of the Liao empresses were descendants of either Xiao Dilu or Aguzhi. The lineage of Xiao Dilu produced a total of four consorts and that of Aguzhi five.

The lineage of Aguzhi was more successful than that of his elder brother not only in producing consorts, but also in dominating the influential offices in the Liao administration. It produced a total of sixteen male members who reached the posts of Northern Prime Minister and Northern Military Commissioner.⁵ At least fifteen men from this lineage whose biographies are provided in the *Liaoshi* married the imperial daughters. As for the lineage of Shizong's mother, Empress Rouzhen, it appears to have been the least illustrious one among the three for it produced only one biological mother of an emperor and no other reigning empresses or influential consorts. Her brother Xiao Talage was the only identifiable individual from this lineage who occupied the post of Northern Prime Minister.⁶ It also appears that the lineage of Empress Rouzhen was not

⁵ There was the total of forty-seven individuals from the two ruling clans who had served the posts of Northern Prime Minister and Northern military commissioner from the two ruling clans. See Ik-jou Choi, 55-6.

⁶ See his biography in LS 90:1358. He should not be confused with Xiao Taliege who was active much later in time during the reign of Xingzong. For the biography of Xiao Taliege, see LS 85:1318. Scholars such as Jennifer Holmgren and Ik-jou Choi speculated that Xiao Talage and Xiao Talie, father of Xiao Hailin, who served as Northern Prime Minister during the reign of Muzong, were two different names referring to the same individual. I am not entirely convinced with their hypothesis, therefore, I consider Xiao Talage as the only kinsman of Empress Rouzhen that can be identified in the *Liaoshi*. Xiao Hailin was not only an illustrious official, but an imperial-son-in-law as well by marrying in succession two princesses. See his biography in LS 78:1266. See also Ik-jou Choi, 56-7; Jennifer

related to those of Empress Chunqin, because her brother, Xiao Talage, is said to have come from Six Divisions 六院, one of the branches of the imperial clan, the Yelü.⁷

Perhaps the most puzzling element about the *Liaoshi* accounts on the consort clan is that Bali and Yishisi are referred to as two branches of the consort clan when in reality only the Shulu lineage of Empress Chunqin supplied all of the successive empresses, except Muzong's. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the Xiao individuals listed in the consort clan table in the *Liaoshi* are said to have belonged to either Senior (Xiao Dilu) or Junior (Xiao Aguzhi) Patriarchal Households, while no one is identified as a member of the Greater Elder and Lesser Elder Households of the Yishisi lineage. Why then was Yishisi referred to as an imperial consort lineage? More importantly, why were the descendants of Xiao Dilu and Aguzhi, who had come from the Shulu lineage, assigned genealogical positions in branches of the Bali lineage?

It is extremely difficult to establish a plausible hypothesis on the identity of the Bali and Yishisi due to skewed information provided in the *Liaoshi*. Hashiguchi Kaneo expressed his doubt about the historical authenticity of the *Liaoshi* passages, which state that Bali and Yishisi were derived from an ancient proto-kin group called Shenmi. He believed that it was a fabrication supported by few facts.⁸ Even if we disregard the

Holmgren, "Marriage, kinship", 59-60 and 67. Xiao Hailin will be discussed again in the context of marriages of Liao princesses below.

⁷ His lineage originally did not belong to Six Divisions of the Imperial Clan. According to his biography, because one of grand uncles was involved in the conspiratorial murder of then Commander-in-chief of the confederation force, Yelü Shulu, Taizu's paternal uncle, his kinsmen, including Talage himself, were transferred to constitute the personal guards (*hongyi gong* 弘義宮) of Taizu. His position in Six Divisions must have been obtained after the transfer. See Ik-jou Choi, 69; Wittfogel and Feng, 238. See his biography in LS 90:1358.

⁸ Hashiguchi Kaneo, 165-170.

Liaoshi account on Shenmi, we may perhaps plausibly speculate that Bali and Yishisi represented certain kin groups that had flourished prior to the rise of the lineages of Abaoji and his wife to prominence during the last decade of the ninth century. Some scholars have recently suggested that Bali and Yishisi must represent kin groups that had intermarried with the previous ruling clans of Dahe (Li) and Yaolian. According to this argument, they constituted the Khitan elite, along with the ruling clans, during the pre-dynastic era.⁹ Nevertheless, there is no textual evidence to support the claim that the Shulu family of the Uighur heritage were somehow related to, or descended from, one of the two kin groups later referred to as Bali and Yishisi. As for the reasons why these three lineages were lumped together and given a common clan name Xiao, another passage from the *Liaoshi* from the chapter on the prefectures (*yingweizhi* 營衛志) might provide us with a useful insight into how the names of the Liao ruling clans should be understood in a certain context.¹⁰

三耶律: 一曰大賀, 二曰遙輦, 三曰世里, 卽皇族也. 二審密:
一曰乙室已, 二曰拔里, 卽國舅也.....大賀, 遙輦析爲六, 而世里合爲一,
茲所以迭刺部終遙輦之世, 強不可制云.

There were three Yelüs: the first refers to the Dahe, the second, the Yaolian, and the third the Shili, the imperial clan. Of the two Shenmis, the first was called the Yishisi, the second the Bali, (and these two were called) the imperial consort clan.....The Dahe and the Yaolian were divided into six (sub-lineages), which were then combined with the Shili

⁹ Xiang Nan and Yang Ruoshu, "Lun Qidanzu de hunyin zhidu", in *Liaojinshi lunwenji* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1985), 100-135, particularly, 107-110. They also hypothesized that the Shenmi must have been the alternative name for the family of Sun Wanrong 孫萬榮, who had been invested by the Tang imperial house as the vassal king of the Khitan in 685.

¹⁰ LS 32: 381. This passage reappears in the chapter on the genealogy (世表) in LS without serious modifications. See LS 63: 950.

to become one (clan). This is what it means to say that the Yila tribe ended the rule of the Yaolian and their power cannot be surpassed.

In this context, it is obvious that the imperial clan name Yelü does not refer to a particular lineage from which Abaoji, the dynastic founder, came. Instead, it seems to have been used as a sort of blanket term meaning “ruling clan”, which encompassed all the previous ruling clans as well as the current one. We have briefly discussed above the *Liaoshi* claims that the Dahe and Yaolian were the two ruling clans that dominated the leadership of the Khitan confederation from the seventh to the end of ninth century, until the latter was finally replaced by Abaoji, who came from a ruling lineage of the Yila tribe.¹¹ When Yelü was adopted as the imperial name for the lineage of Abaoji, which had been initially called Shili, the two previous ruling clans were also granted with the same clan name. In other words, the latter were given a kind of honorary membership of the imperial clan.

Although Abaoji’s paternal ancestors had been successful in dominating the leadership of the Yila tribe by producing a number of chieftains, they did not play prominent roles at the confederation level until the end of ninth century. Perhaps, it was deemed necessary by the dynastic founder to glorify his genealogy, which had recently emerged from a relative obscurity, in order to justify his leadership takeover. We will return to this topic later. Upon his accession, Abaoji proclaimed that his lineage belonged to the Yaolian clan as one of its sub-lineages.¹² The motivation behind this

¹¹ LS 63: 950-7.

¹² LS 1: 3. The edict declared that the Yelü constituted the tenth tent (household) of the Yaolian clan which is said to have had originally nine divisions (遙輦氏九帳).

edict was clear. He desired to elevate the ritual status of his lineage by implying the consanguineous linkage between his lineage and a prominent lineage of the previous era.¹³

To sum up, we can conclude that the term “imperial clan 皇族” and the clan name Yelü are used in the *Liaoshi* with two different meanings, depending on the context. In a strict and narrow sense, they refer to the lineage of the dynastic founder, Yelü Abaoji, only. However, they are used on rare occasions, such as the case cited above, very loosely to refer to all or any ruling clans including the ones from the era of tribal confederation. It is only logical to deduce that the meaning of “consort clan” was defined in the same way. Almost all the time, it refers to the Shulu, lineage of Empress Chunqin, which provided all the Liao empresses except one and the vast majority of imperial sons-in-law throughout the dynastic period. Strictly speaking, therefore, only the Shulu had a permanent marriage lien to the imperial clan. On the other hand, it was used sometimes as a general appellation to include all of the kin groups that might have intermarried with the powerful clans, such as the Yaolian, who are said to have dominated the confederation leadership of the pre-dynastic era. The *Liaoshi* genealogical table of the consort clan classifies the descendants of Xiao Dilu and Xiao Aguzhi as members of either Senior or Junior Patriarchal Households of the Bali lineage. This should be understood in the same light as the decree issued by Taizu which declared that his lineage was incorporated into the Yaolian clan. All these measures were aimed at the goal of enhancing the status of the newly established ruling clans of Yelü and Xiao to the level of

¹³ Xiang Nan and Yang Ruoshu, 107-9.

the legendary prosperous kin groups of the past by insinuating direct genealogical connections between them. Having descended from the ruling families, the *Liaoshi* asserts, the Yelü and Xiao could not be anything but the legitimate successors of the Khitan leadership.

CHAPTER 3: THE PATTERNS OF THE LIAO IMPERIAL MARRIAGES

Introduction

Because two branches of the Uighur-Khitans kin group, later named as Xiao, had an exclusive and permanent claim to provide primary wives for all emperors, the Liao imperial marriages came to exhibit a number of unique characteristics that are rarely seen in Chinese dynasties. Such characteristics include repetitive marriages between close consanguineous kin, cross-generational unions and inheritance marriages (younger sister marrying her dead older sister's husband or a widow entering a union with her deceased husband's brother or nephew). In this chapter, we will first attempt to identify genealogical position of each empress and the relationship. Then we discuss the consequences of the exclusive marriage agreement between the two ruling clans how it eventually benefited the empresses and the members of the Xiao clan much more than the emperors in the Liao political structure. The cases of Non-Chinese features of the Khitan marriages recorded in the sources will also be discussed below.

Marriage of the Ruling Elite of the Conquest Dynasties

The underlying principle of the Liao imperial marriage, shared by all other non-Han conquest regimes, was simple. Inter-marriage between the emperors and their offspring and the conquered population, the majority of which comprised of Chinese, was strongly discouraged if not prohibited. Such policies were devised to protect the privileged status in the government and society of the ruling elite and to keep a clear demarcation between

the rulers and the conquered subjects. Maintaining the established social order was critical for the survival of the conquest regimes, particularly when the ruling class was seriously outnumbered by the governed.¹

The ruling houses of so-called conquest dynasties, such as the Liao, Yüan 元 (ca. 1260-1368) and the Qing 清 (1644-1911), practiced strict endogamy. Only a small number of the elite families were entitled to provide wives for emperors and the members of the imperial clan. While the Manchu rulers selected their consorts from a limited pool of prominent banner families of the Manchu and the Mongol ethnicity, the Mongol khans had a tendency of preferring the women from a particular clan, the Onggirat clan, as their wives.² Although the marriage of the Liao emperors (the Yelü 耶律) exhibits many similarities to that of the Manchu and the Mongols, it was perhaps more exclusive and a more regulated form of endogamy than others, for they took wives only from a single clan, the Xiao 蕭. Out of a total of twenty empresses and consorts listed in the *Liaoshi* 遼史 chapter on Empresses and Consorts (*houfeichuan* 后妃傳), only one was not a Xiao. She was the Chinese consort of Emperor Shizong 世宗 (r. 947-951) named Miss Zhen 甄.³ Moreover, the ancestry of all the empresses, except Muzong's empress, can be traced back to the two brothers of the first empress, Chunqin 淳欽皇后, wife of the dynastic founder, Yelü Abaoji 耶律阿保機 (872-926), later canonized as Taizu 太祖

¹ Jennifer Holmgren, "Imperial Marriage", 77-8.

² Herbert Franke, "Women under the Dynasties of Conquest", 28; Jennifer Holmgren, "Imperial Marriage", 84-7.

³ LS 71:1197-1208.

(r. 907-926). Two lineages derived from her brothers, Xiao Dilu 蕭敵魯(d. 918) and Xiao Aguzhi 蕭阿古只, also supplied the vast majority of spouses for the imperial princesses throughout the dynastic era.

This does not mean that the Liao emperors did not keep non-Xiao women in their harem. On the contrary, women of various ethnic backgrounds were allowed into the palace but only the women from the Xiao clan were eligible to be appointed to the position of empress. The external structure of the Liao imperial harem discerned from the *Liaoshi* accounts appears to have been a parody of that of the Chinese dynasties with the empress on top of the hierarchy. Because there was only one empress at a time, the system was arguably monogamous in a loose sense, although there seems to have been an exception, as we shall discuss below. In reality, however, the Liao imperial harem was not as strictly stratified as those of the Chinese dynasties, whose elaborate bureaucratic ranking system clearly defined the status of each consort in the harem.⁴ The status of a Liao consort who had not been empress during her husband's reign could be later elevated to the status of empress if her son was chosen as the imperial successor. Upon his accession, the third Liao emperor Shizong 世宗 (r. 947-51) bestowed upon his mother the title of Empress Dowager Rouzhen 柔貞皇后, although his father, Bei 倍(900-37), the eldest son of Taizu 太祖(r. 907-26) never reigned.⁵ When the sixth emperor

⁴ Evelyn S. Rawski, "Ch'ing Imperial Marriage", in *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, eds. Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 170-203. See particularly, 170-2; Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperor: A social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 131-3.

⁵ LS 5: 63-4.

Shengzong (r. 982-1031) died, he was survived by his principal wife, Empress Rende. This did not prevent his successor, Xingzong (r. 1031-55), to declare his biological mother, who was a consort, empress dowager, immediately after his accession to the throne. She is later known in history as Empress Dowager Qinai 欽哀皇后. Two empresses-dowagers, therefore, co-existed in the court of Xingzong although only briefly.⁶

Not all the consorts, however, had equal opportunity for upward mobility as long as they succeeded in producing an heir to the throne. The fact that all of nine Liao emperors were born by the consorts from the Xiao clan seems to strongly suggest that only the offspring of the Xiao wives were entitled to succeed the throne. The imperial sons from Chinese or Bohai 勃海 consorts were likely to have been automatically excluded from the pool of candidates for the succession of the throne.⁷

Liao Empresses and Unique Marriage Patterns

We have noted earlier that Taizu had married the daughter of his paternal aunt. Such marriage was not unheard of in China but it was generally discouraged. Theoretically, cross-cousin marriages were considered legal, as long as the parties involved had

⁶ Evelyn S. Rawski explains that the Qing consorts were also frequently elevated to the position of empress once their sons ascended the throne. See “Ch’ing Imperial Marriage”, 172-3. For the official biographies of Empress Dowager Rende and Qinai, see LS 71:1201-1204.

⁷ Bohai (698-926) was the kingdom established by the remnants of aristocrats of Koguryo 高句麗 (B.C. 37-A.D. 668) and the Moho 靺鞨 tribal elements. During its peak of power, its territory encompassed the south of Yalu River to modern day Liaoning Province. It was conquered by the Khitan force personally led by Abaoji in 926. F. W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 33-4.

different surnames. However, while the matrimonial unions between matrilineal cousins were frequently contracted in all walks of the society, those between patrilineal cousins were rare. This was particularly true for the imperial marriages. The empress in a native Chinese dynasty was seldom the paternal cousin of the emperor.⁸ On the contrary, the Liao emperors and the imperial clansmen married both matrilineal and patrilineal cousins but, over all, the former were preferred as the most desirable spouses. Because the emperors chose their wives exclusively from two lineages derived from the brothers of the first empress, the pattern of the Liao imperial marriage is extremely repetitive. The pool of eligible candidates for the position of empress was rather restricted in each generation, which was perhaps the reason why many marriages were contracted in complete disregard of generational difference. The table below exhibits the genealogical relations between the emperors and their primary consorts.

Table 1. Marriage of Emperors

Generation	Emperors (temple name)	Empresses (posthumous title)	Genealogical position of Empresses
1	Taizu (r. 907-926)	Chunqin 淳欽	Daughter of Pogu 婆姑. Genealogical position unknown
2	Taizong (r. 926-947)	Jingan 靖安	Taizong's Mother's brother's daughter
3	Shizong (r. 947-951)	Huaijie 懷節	Shizong's father's mother's brother's daughter(FMBD)
3	Muzong (r. 951-969)	No title	Daughter of Xiao Zhifan 蕭知璠, whose genealogical position is unknown
4	Jingzong (r. 969-983)	Ruizhi 睿智	Granddaughter in male line of a man in the same generation as Jingzong's father's father's mother.

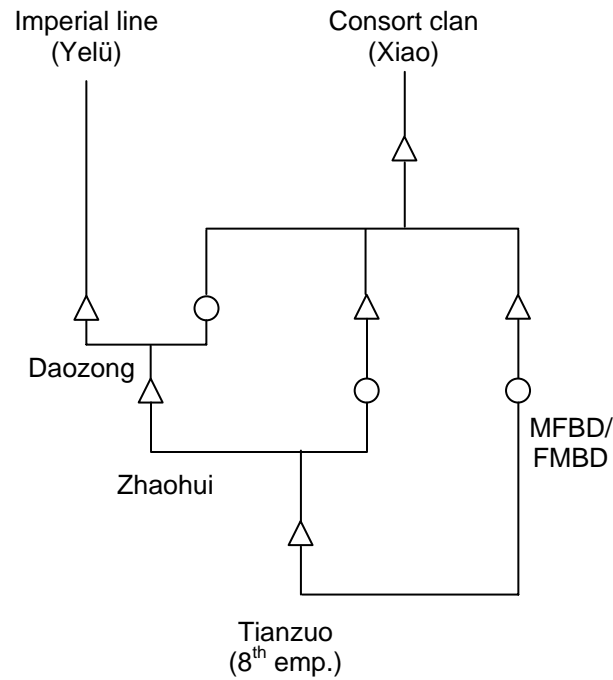
⁸ Empror Wu of Former Han dynasty was one of the few Chinese emperors who married their patrilineal cousins. Jennifer Holmgren, "Imperial Marriage", 60-68.

Generation	Emperors (temple name)	Empresses (posthumous title)	Genealogical position of Empresses
5	Shengzong (r. 983-1031)	i) Rende 仁德 ii) Qinai 欽哀	Shengzong's mother's brother's daughter Descendant in fourth generation from Shengzong's great-grandfather's mother's brother
6	Xingzong (r. 1031-1055)	i) Consort Sancha (personal name) ii) Renyi 仁懿	Daughter of Xingzong's half-sister's husband Xingzong's mother's brother's daughter
7	Daozong (r. 1055-1101)	Xuanyi 宣懿	Daozong's father's mother's brother's daughter(FMBD)
8	Prince Zhaohui (1058-1077)		Heir apparent who was killed before his accession to throne
9	Tianzuo (r. 1101-1125)	Duolilan 奪里懶 (personal name)	Descendant in fourth generation from Tianzuo's great great-grandfather's mother's brother

Adapted from Karl Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng in *History of Chinese Society, Liao (907-1125)*.

Taizu and Empress Chunqin must have belonged to the same generational class for they were cousins. Most marriages in the succeeding generations, however, were cross-generational. The primary wife of the Liao emperor was often his mother's brother's daughter (MBD) or his father's mother's brother's daughter (FMBD), as we can see from the table. In some cases, she was both. The marriage of the last emperor Tianzuo illustrates very well the relationship between the throne and his primary consort.⁹

⁹ Wittfogel and Feng, 210-211; Jennifer Holmgren, "Imperial Marriage", 82-3.



FMBD refers to his father's maternal cousin
 MFBD refers to his mother's paternal cousin
 Adapted from Jennifer Holmgren, "Imperial Marriage"

Figure 4. Cross-generational marriage with MFBD/FMBD

It seems plausible then to assume that the Liao empresses were generally mature by the time of their marriage. In some cases, they were probably considerably older than their emperor husbands. The maturity and generational superiority, Jennifer Holmgren argues, must have worked to the advantage of the Liao imperial wives. A Liao empress was provided with a strong position at the court that allowed her to exert a great influence already during her husband's lifetime before she became elevated to the status of senior imperial widow.¹⁰ Moreover, as a mature woman, she was less likely to be manipulated

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; Jennifer Holmgren, "Imperial Marriage", 56-7.

or dominated by the male members of her natal family, unlike her counterparts in Chinese dynasties. The position of the Liao empress was, therefore, secure for many reasons. At court, she was surrounded by her kinsmen occupying the key offices while in the inner palace, she engineered the marriage of her sons to the daughters of her brothers to keep the close ties between her natal family and the imperial clan to in order to ensure her family's continuous access to power. If she outlived her husband and one of her sons inherited the throne, she had no fear of competition from the junior empress, who was her niece and more easily controllable than a stranger from an entirely different family. As we will see in the next chapter, all of the three regents of the Liao dynasty, Empress Chunqin, Ruizhi, and Qinai, acted on their own without receiving any direction from their relatives in issuing edicts and policies, once they took over the conduct of government.¹¹

Cross-generational marriage was not the only feature of the Liao imperial marriage that was considered somewhat unusual or distasteful by the eyes of the Chinese. Scholars have long argued that polygamy, one of the remnants of tribal customs, was still practiced during the dynastic period. The most frequently cited case in support of this argument involves Shizong and his Chinese consort, Miss Zhen. If we accept the claims of the *Liaoshi* and *Qidan guozhi*, Shizong was the only Liao emperor who attempted to appoint a non-Xiao woman, a non-Khitans to be more exact, as empress. He is said to have acquired her when he accompanied his uncle Taizong to China in the punitive military campaign against the state of Later Jin 後晉(936-46) sometime at the end of 946

¹¹ *Ibid.*,

or in the beginning of 947.¹² After only a few months of occupation of the Jin capital, Taizong suddenly fell ill and died on his journey back to the Liao. Shizong was quickly declared as new emperor by the courtiers and generals on the spot. Upon his accession to the throne, he declared his Chinese consort as his empress. That she was elevated to the position of empress, however, is narrated only in her biography in the *Liaoshi* and cannot be verified in the annals, which mention only the appointment of a Xiao consort of Shizong's as empress in 950, whose temple name was Empress Huaijie. This Xiao lady was in fact daughter of Xiao Aguzhi, the younger brother of Empress Dowager Chunqin. She had married Shizong shortly before his accession.¹³ On the other hand, *Qidan guizhi* acknowledges Miss Zhen as Shizong's only empress. It claims that she bore six sons for Shizong, one of whom succeeded the throne as the fifth Liao emperor, Jingzong. This account is refuted by the *Liaoshi* which clearly states that Jingzong was the second of son of Shizong by Empress Huaijie. Moreover, the fact that Miss Zhen was already forty-one years old when she met Shizong in China, asserted by *Qidan guozhi* itself, seems to reduce the credibility of the account on her bearing six sons afterwards.¹⁴ A careful contemplation on the contradictory accounts in the sources would yield the following conclusion.

¹² According to her biography in the *Liaoshi*, she was originally a palace attendant in the Later Tang dynasty. Her beauty attracted the attention of Shizong, who was titled Prince Yongkang at the time. She bore one son, Zhimo, for Shizong. See her biography in LS 71:1201. *Qidan guozhi* claims that she belonged to the harem of the last ruler of the Later Tang dynasty. Shizong acquired her when he entered Daliang (Bian), the capital of the Later Jin. She was already forty-one years old when she became Shizong's consort. Wittfogel and Feng, 211; QDGZ 13: 2b-3a.

¹³ LS 5: 65; LS 71:1201. It is said that she was married to Shizong when the latter received the title of Prince Yongkang in the first year of the Datong era (947)

¹⁴ Wittfogel and Feng, 211-2; LS 8: 89; QDGZ 13: 128. According to the *Liaoshi*, she bore only one son named Zhimo. See LS 64:985.

It is possible that Shizong announced Miss Zhen as empress upon his accession instead of his Xiao consort, as *Qidan guozhi* and her biography in the *Liaoshi* contend. Three years later, his Xiao wife was declared empress as well, which means that two empresses co-existed in the Liao court at one point, despite the short duration. In less than a year in the fall of 951 both of them were murdered along with the emperor by the rebels.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, there is no mention in the sources of Miss Zhen being demoted to a lower rank when Empress Huaijie was elevated to the position of empress. When Jingzong ascended the throne, he is said to have arranged a proper burial for “the two empresses”, which has been suggested as the most indisputable textual evidence in favor of the argument that the custom of polygamy persisted in the Liao imperial marriages as late as the third reign.¹⁶

In addition, Karl Wittfogel was convinced that a series of conspiracies plotted by some of the high profile Khitan nobles to dethrone Shizong only a few months after his accession indirectly testify that indeed Miss Zhen, not his Xiao consort, was appointed as empress initially. He argues that these attempted revolts were resistance of the Khitan nobles against the various measures newly adopted by Shizong to curb the power of the aristocrats. Included among the ringleaders were Shizong’s brother-in-law, Xiao Han and Prince Tiande, Taizong’s second son, who had been most ardent supporters of Shizong’s accession a few months earlier.¹⁷ Had it not been for their support, Shizong

¹⁵ LS 5: 65-6; LS 71: 1201.

¹⁶ Wittfogel and Feng, 211-2; Jennifer Holmgren, “Marriage, Kinship”, 60-1.

¹⁷ Xiao Han was son of Xiao Dilu, elder brother of Empress Chunqin. He married Princess Abuli, younger sister of Shizong in 948. Shortly afterwards, however, he participated in the conspiracy with Tiande to usurp Shizong but was pardoned. In the following year, he and Princess Abuli attempted

could not have successfully quelled the challenge of his formidable grandmother, Empress Dowager Chunqin, who had initially disapproved of him in favor of her own son as successor. Xiao Han, the empress dowager's nephew, played a particularly important role in the process for he was one of the most prominent members of the consort clan. By taking the side of Shizong, he created a division within the Xiao clan which seriously undermined the power base of the empress dowager.¹⁸ The sources are not explicit about the reasons of the sudden abandonment of loyalty on the part of the Khitan noblemen only a few months after the beginning of Shizong's rule.

It is possible that some began to resent Shizong's administrative reforms that would limit the authority of prime ministers, to whose offices the members of the imperial and consort clans had hereditary claims. In addition, Shizong's decision to promote his Chinese consort to empress must have outraged the entire Xiao clan and many other Khitan aristocrats. The alliance between the two ruling clans was founded on their mutual agreement on exclusive marriage exchange. Appointment of a non-Xiao woman to the position of empress, therefore, meant a breach of their contract. This action had serious implications for all the Khitan nobles beyond the members of the Xiao clan for it signified a serious disruption of the social order by elevating one of the conquered subjects to the most exalted status in the social pyramid. The mounting anger

another revolt and this time he was executed. For the biography of Xiao Han, see LS 113: 1505-6. As for Prince Tiande's biography, see LS 64: 980-1. Also see LS 5: 64-5.

¹⁸ Han is said to have harbored resentment towards his aunt, Empress Dowager Chunqin, for she had his mother murdered. But the specifics regarding this incident are not described in the *Liaoshi*. See his biography in LS 113: 1505-6. However, his motivation for supporting Shizong must have been political as well, for he was married to Shizong's sister, Princess Abuli. He did not have close ties to Lihu. See Ik-jou Choi, 84-5.

and discontent of the nobles soon erupted in the form of multiple rebellions.¹⁹

Conspiracies were uncovered quickly and pacified by the execution of ringleaders such as Xiao Han and Prince Tiande.²⁰ In any case, the incident might have reminded Shizong of the potential danger of provoking the resentment of the Khitan nobles, particularly the Xiao clan, according to Karl Wittfogel. Perhaps this explains his belated declaration of his Xiao wife as empress in 950. It is likely he wished to mend the damaged relationship with the nobles by doing so. His effort came too late, however, for he was assassinated while asleep, along with his two consorts, by a group of rebels headed by one of his paternal uncles in 951. He was only thirty-three years old.²¹

In contrast to the example of Shizong's two empresses, some Liao emperors seem not to have appointed empresses. Moreover, they would let the position remain unfilled if it became vacant. When Taizong's empress died prematurely in 935, he was a young man of thirty-three, but no other consort was appointed as empress until the end of his reign. Considering that Taizong was under the heavy influence of his strong-willed mother throughout his reign, it is possible that she did not wish to establish another junior empress after the death of her niece, Empress Jingan, so that she could continue her political domination with minimal interference.²²

¹⁹ Ik-jou Choi, 85; Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 64-5.

²⁰ LS 5:64-5; LS 113:1505-6. It is interesting to note that Xiao Han's wife, Princess Abuli, also participated in the conspiracies. She died in prison in 949. Tiande was executed while Liuge, the son of Taizu's fourth son, Yindeshi, was exiled to the frontier. For Liuge's biography, see LS 113:1507-8.

²¹ Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 61; LS 5:66; LS 71:1201. The murderer of Shizong was Chage, son of Taizu's fifth son, Anduan. See his biography in LS 112:1499.

²² Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 58-9.

The *Liaoshi* annals do not mention that the fourth emperor Muzong ever appointed an empress during the eighteen years of his reign. Although a very brief biography on Muzong's empress is provided in the chapter on the imperial consorts, it is devoid of specific information except her father's personal name. The genealogical position of her father in the Xiao clan cannot be established, which makes her the only empress unrelated to Empress Chunqin, as we have remarked earlier. Neither her childhood name nor her posthumous official title is recorded in her biography, unlike the rest of the empresses. She is merely described as a weak-natured woman who exerted little influence at the court and in the inner palace. It is possible that she was merely one of the consorts of Muzong and never received formal recognition as empress during her lifetime.²³ A few centuries later the *Liaoshi* compilers must have randomly selected her case and listed her biography in the chapter for the empresses in order to give the appearance that every Liao emperor had an empress in accordance with the format of the standard Chinese dynastic histories. Therefore, we can conclude with some degree of certainty that the Khitan ruling class during the early dynastic era had not yet fully subscribed to the Chinese model of imperial harem in which empress was situated on the top of the hierarchy and other consorts were given decidedly inferior status and rank. The inner palace of the Liao was governed by considerably fewer regulations. The

²³ *Ibid.*, 61-2. She further speculates that Muzong's infertility during the eighteen years of his reign might have been the result of sexual avoidance on his part. It is possible that he resented his Xiao consorts for they were placed in his harem by Empress Chunqin to serve the political purpose of her and her clansmen.

position of empress was sometimes left unoccupied for a lengthy period of time and the status of the consorts was not clearly defined by various ranks.²⁴

Sororate appears to have been another unique custom from the tribal Khitan era that survived into the dynastic period. Taizong issued an edict in 940 to abolish the compulsory sororate union in which a younger sister was obligated to take the place of her older sister in marriage when the latter died.²⁵ It is impossible to figure out the actual impact of such an edict on the Khitan population in general. However, as far as the imperial clan is concerned, the edict appears to have had little impact. For instance, Yelü Longqing, the younger brother of Shengzong, is said to have taken two daughters of his younger sister as his consorts.²⁶ After the demotion and death of his first wife, Daozong also kept sisters in his palace. His consort, Huifei, who was later named empress only to be demoted in a few years, and her younger sister, served the emperor concurrently.²⁷ One of Daozong's daughters is said to have entered what appears a compulsory levirate union with the younger brother of her first husband after the death of the former. The details of this case will be discussed in the following chapter on imperial daughters.

²⁴ *Ibid.*,

²⁵ Wittfogel and Feng, 255; LS 4:49.

²⁶ Zhu Zifang, "Liao Chenguo gongzhu, Xiao Jin muzhi chuyi." *Liaohai wenwu xuekan* 1(1988), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997), 247-253.

²⁷ Daozong's empress, Empress Xüanyi, fell victim to a slander invented by Yelü Yixin, who was then the most powerful official at the court. Both she and her son, Crown Prince Zhaoyi, were demoted and later killed as the result of Yixin's conniving manipulation of the emperor. After her death, Yixin exerted his influence on the emperor in establishing one of Daozong's consorts as the second empress. The new empress, Huifei, had entered Daozong's harem through her connection to Yelü Yixin, therefore, he could easily control and direct her. Yelü Yixin also placed her younger sister, who was in fact his daughter in law, in the imperial harem after forcing her to divorce her husband. Only a few years later in 1080 Yelü Yixin fell out of the favor of the emperor and was exiled, Huifei and her younger sister were demoted and expelled from the palace as well. LS 71:1205-6; Twitchett and Tietze, 134-136.

The characteristics of the Khitan imperial marriage discussed above were not confined to the Khitan but were widely shared by many different peoples of Inner and northeast Asia. The Uighurs, from whom the early Khitans received a tremendous socio-political influence, the Koryŏ people, the Jurchen and the Mongols are all well known for having frequently contracted marriages without generational considerations and between close consanguineous relatives. Although the documented cases of levirate and sororate are not numerous, the fact that such marriages continued to occur as late as the reign of Daozong is proof enough to support the argument that the Khitan never completely abandoned their old tribal ways and customs even after the long years of exposure to the Chinese social institutions and culture.²⁸

While no information on the marriage of non-aristocratic population of the Liao is provided in the *Liaoshi*, some relevant passages can be found in an essay on Jurchen customs and culture compiled not long after the collapse of the Liao. It was written by a Southern Song scholar named Hong Hao 洪皓(1088-1155) who wrote down his first-hand observation of customs of various ethnic groups living under the Jurchen rule during his stay in the Jin 金 (1115-1234) territory sometime around 1129.²⁹ In reference to Bin 賓 prefecture, Hong Hao mentions that young and wealthy Khitan and Jurchen noblemen openly engaged in amusement with the local young women in dancing and drinking. During the festivities, a young girl could choose to elope with her lover and her

²⁸ There is only one case of levirate marriage found in the *Liaoshi*. Princess Teli, the second daughter of Daozong, was married in succession to Xiao Chouwo and Xiao Temo, who had been brothers. See below for further details of this marriage.

²⁹ This work is titled *Songmo jiwēn* 松漠記聞 and preserved in *Shuo fu* 說郛, ed. Tao Zongyi. Hong Hao is said to have lived with the Jurchen as a hostage for many years.

parents did not show any objection to it. Several years later she would visit her parents with a newborn and a cartful of food and gifts. Then her parents would finally recognize her lover as son-in-law.³⁰ In addition to elopement, Hong Hao remarked on the prevalence of custom of “wife-stealing” in the region of Yan 燕 on the sixteenth day of the first month. He particularly noted that the custom had been in existence since the times of the Khitan occupation of the region. Only on that day, playful stealing of various goods was permitted including unmarried girls. If a girl was kidnapped and kept by a young man in want of wife for a several days, she was permitted to stay with him if she wished so.³¹ According to Hong Hao’s account, young women in these regions enjoyed a considerable freedom in their behavior and were not bound by many social restrictions. They were not confined to their quarters but joined men in activities such as drinking, singing, and dancing in public places. They were also given an option of choosing their own partners. To Hong Hao’s astonishment, marriage decided by young men and women themselves was considered superior to one contracted by exchanging betrothal gifts.³² Like levirate and disregard of generation in marriage, elopement and marriage by abduction are said to have been widely practiced by the neighboring tribes of the Khitan including Shiwei and the Jurchen. They also became the main target of severe

³⁰ This visit is called *baimen* 拜門. Almost identical passages can be found in *Qidan guozhi* as well. See QDGZ 26, 2b-3a; Wittfogel and Feng, 277-8.

³¹ Wen Weijian 文惟簡, a scholar who lived during the early Jin period, also wrote almost identical description of the custom of free stealing during the Jin dynasty, however, without mentioning the Khitan origin of the custom. See *Luting Sishi* 廷事實 (Veritable Facts from the Court of Caitiffs) in *Shou Fu* 8:47-9. Translation of this text is available by Herbert Franke, “Chinese Texts on the Jurchen: A Translation of the Jurchen Monograph in the San-ch’ao Pei-meng Hui-pien”, *Zentralasiatische Studien* 9 (1975):119-186, particularly 178-186.

³² See Hong Hao, *Songmo jiwèn*, in *Shuo Fuo* 8:172-3; Wittfogel and Feng, 277.

criticism of the contemporary Chinese observers who perceived them as sign of sheer barbarity and depravity.³³

It is possible that general moral laxity was not restricted to commoners in these localities that became the objects of Hong Hao's observation, although similar reports on the Khitan aristocrats are few and far in between. *Qidan guozhi* offers an extraordinary account on the scandalous marriage of Hulian 胡輦 (d. 1007), the eldest sister of Empress Ruizhi, Jingzong's wife. Hulian had been married to a very powerful imperial clansman, Prince Yansage (d. 970), the second son of Taizong.³⁴ After the death of her husband, she assumed a significant role in the Khitan military by personally leading punitive campaigns against the unruly tribes in the western frontier in 994, which is also recorded in the *Liaoshi*. *Qidan guozhi* claims that it was during this western expedition when she acquired a handsome foreign slave with whom she fell in love.³⁵ She kept him as her personal attendant. Upon learning about this affair, Empress Dowager Ruizhi was outraged. The slave was penalized with a round of heavy beating and ordered to be separated from his owner. Years later, Hulian still pleaded with her sister that she wished to marry her former slave. The empress dowager yielded to her sister this time and granted her permission. While historical authenticity of this story remains questionable,

³³ The best known passage of such nature comes from *Luting shishi* in which Wen Weijian vehemently criticized the custom of levirate among the Jurchen. He said, "Brothers, nephews (of the deceased) all are allowed to become engaged to her (the widow). There are even people who have made their step-mother their wife, just like dogs and pigs." See Herbert Franke, "Chinese Texts on Jurchen", 181. See also *Luting shishi* in *Shuo fu* 8, 174-5.

³⁴ Prince Yansage was the second son of Taizong and Empress Jingan. He was later given the title of Prince of Qi by Jingzong. See LS 64: 979.

³⁵ He is described as *fan nu* 番奴. Fan is often used to refer to various tribes indigenous in the west including the Tibetans and possibly the Zubu tribes.

it is truly remarkable that a widowed aristocratic woman is described to have had the power and freedom to choose her partner of lower social standing, which would have been entirely unimaginable for women of the upper social strata in China.

CHAPTER 4: FEMALE REGENTS OF THE LIAO

Introduction

During the dynastic period, a total of three Liao empresses ruled the empire as de facto sovereigns with the authority of a regent on behalf of the emperors. They were Empress Chunqin, wife of the first emperor, Taizu, Empress Ruizhi, Jingzong's empress, and Empress Qinai, primary consort of Shengzong. Except the regency of Empress Ruizhi, which lasted as long as twenty six years, the regencies of the other two empresses were short-lived. However, the fact that these three women served as regents is hardly the only important reason why we want to learn about their lives. As a matter of fact, the regency was originally a Chinese political institution, devised in order to ensure the safe transfer of throne within the imperial lineage during the emergencies, such as a sudden death of a ruler without heir or the accession of a ruler who was too young to govern on his own. Throughout the entire imperial era, approximately thirty female regents were appointed, some of whom were extremely ambitious and willful, thus became the controversial figures in Chinese history. They would override the reigning emperors' political will and decided the matters of government on their own. Some refused to step down long after the emperors came of age.¹ For example, the Liao's southern neighbor, the Northern Song saw as many as five female regents during its 166 years of its existence.² If the regency is not unique to the Liao dynasty and the native Chinese

¹ Zhang Bangwei, *Songdai huangqin yu zhengzhi*, (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1993), 143.

² Priscilla Chung, *Palace Women in the Northern Sung, 960-1126*, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1981), 6.

dynasty produced far more female rulers than the Liao, why has it been often claimed that Liao empresses, particularly these three regents, in general enjoyed a great prestige and political authority that was equal or sometimes even greater than that of their husbands and sons? Were their cases in fact so extraordinary in terms of the circumstances under which they gained an access to power and the strategies that they employed in order to accomplish their ambitions? In my attempt to answer these questions, I will investigate their lives and political careers as thoroughly as possible by using not only the official biographies provided in the *Liaoshi* but also relevant accounts from other Chinese sources. By understanding their family backgrounds, their marriages, relationships to their husbands, child-bearing and other important events in their lives, we will be able to fathom what essential conditions needed to be fulfilled in order for women to assume the role of political leader in the Liao power structure.

Empress Yingtian 應天 皇后 (Empress Chunqin 淳欽)

Biography

Her official biography in the *Liaoshi* 遼史 states that her clan name was Shulu 述律 and her posthumous name Ping 平. She was born in the Youda tribe 右大部 into a Khitan mother and a Uighur father. That her mother was the daughter of Yundejia 勻德愨 (temple name Xüanzu), grandfather of the dynastic founder, Yelü Abaoji and a younger sister of Abaoji's father, Salade (Dezu), has been discussed above. The paternal ancestry

of Empress Chunqin was clearly Uighur. Her great-great grandfather, Nuosi, the earliest paternal ancestor of hers to be recorded in the *Liaoshi*, must have joined the Khitan tribes sometime around 780s, deducing from the fact that Empress Chunqin was born in 879.³ Both her grandfather and great-grandfather held some sort of tribal titles, whose functions are unknown.⁴

It is clear, however, that Pogu, Empress Chunqin's father, served one of the key offices in the pre-dynastic Khitan tribal administration. Under the khaghans from the Yaolian clan, he occupied the post of *azhagezhi* 阿札割只.⁵ The *Liaoshi* acknowledges that there is no information on what this archaic office in the Yaolian government was in charge of except that it was later incorporated into the Office of Military Commission (shumiyuan 樞密院).⁶ However, Karl Wittfogel convincingly argued that the official title had been originated in the Türkic word *ačqu*, meaning “key” and *ačqučy*, “the holder of the key”, which suggests that the nature of the work involved was something like a treasurer for the khaghans. He also pointed out the fact that Southern Division of Military Commission during the Liao period administered the tribal taxation as further evidence of the connection between this ancient office and taxation.⁷ His argument appears solid and consistent for in fact, quite a few Khitan tribal offices, preserved in the historical sources,

³ She died at the age of 75 *sui* in 953 during the reign of the fourth emperor Muzong. LS, 71:1200.

⁴ Her great-grandfather, Weining, and her grandfather, Zhensi, are said to have held the titles of Sheli and Meili, respectively. Sheli is described as a noble title that can be purchased with ten oxen, camels and a hundred horses. It was originally an honorary title with little functions. Later it was incorporated into the military offices in the ordo. See LS 116:1536; Wittfogel and Feng, 290. No information is available in the *Liaoshi* on Meili.

⁵ LS 45:697.

⁶ LS 45:697; LS 116:1539. Wittfogel and Feng, 476.

⁷ Wittfogel and Feng, 432 and 442.

were proved to have derived from the Türkic words.⁸ This is only natural considering the long and close relationship maintained between the early Khitan and the Türks who had ruled the steppes of Northern Asia from the mid-sixth century to the early 7th century.⁹ Whatever the exact nature of the work that the office *azhagezhi* was in charge of, it appears to have been a fairly high and influential position, considering that it ranked just below Military Commissioner during the dynastic period.¹⁰ As mentioned earlier, the Northern Military Commission was the most vital and powerful organ in the Liao administration.¹¹ Making an alliance with the family of such a prominent official must have brought many political advantages as well as social prestige to Abaoji and his clan.

⁸ Tiyin 惕隱 makes a good example of the Khitan tribal title which was originally borrowed from the Türks. During the Liao, Tiyin referred to a powerful tribal nobleman who was in charge of controlling the four most prominent imperial lineages. It derived from the Türkic word *tigin*, which originally meant brothers and uncles of the khaghans, who shared the responsibility of governing the empire with the khaghans as regional governors like feudal lords. See Thomas Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 132; Wittfogel and Feng, 432 and 448; *Liaoshi* 45:694. It seems that *yilijin*, the Khitan designation for tribal chieftains, also derived from the Türkic word *irkin*, or *erkin*, a title originally reserved for the leaders of the less powerful tribes, while *iltabar* was for those of the powerful and large tribes. See Thomas Barfield, 132. Karl Wittfogel follows Shiratori Kurakichi 白鳥庫吉 and Paul Pelliot's theory that *irkin* meant "superior, principle, master, chief" in Türkic-Mongol vocabulary. See, Wittfogel and Feng, 432.

⁹ The Türks rebelled against their former lords, the Ruanruan (or Rouran), and destroyed their empire in 552 to establish themselves as the new dominating force in the steppe. See Thomas Barfield, 131-150. For the Khitan relationship to the Türks, see Jennifer Holmgren, "Yeh-lü, Yao-lien and Ta-ho", 42-3. The Khitans even acknowledged the Türkic suzerainty as their vassals during the sixth and early seventh centuries. Although the Khitan allegiance to their Türkic lords was interrupted at times, their connection to the latter lasted well into the early Tang period. The Türks at this time were far more advanced than the Khitans in political coordination and setting up an administrative apparatus to govern the extensive empire. There is no doubt that the Khitans learned considerably from their Türkic lords about solidifying the tribal confederation and adopted the Türkic system of official hierarchy, some of which continued to be in use throughout the Liao period.

¹⁰ LS 116:1539.

¹¹ The Liao administration adopted a dual structure which consisted of Northern and Southern Divisions. The former division was in charge of governing the tribal population most of whom resided in the north whose economy was mostly based upon animal husbandry. The southern government was responsible for ruling the sedentary and agricultural population, including the Chinese and Bohai, most of which was incorporated through military conquest. For more details on the Liao dual administration, see Wittfogel and Feng, 440-1 and 434-5.

Ik-jou Choi sharply pointed out that it was not until the times of Dezu, Abaoji's father, when the members of the Yelü family rose to influential positions at the Khitan confederation. Prior to that, they were only successful in dominating the leadership of the Yila tribe since the generation of Abaoji's great-great grandfather, Suzu. The *Liaoshi* indeed describes that the Yila achieved remarkable economic growth and territorial expansion and emerged as the most powerful tribe in the confederation during the last few years of the ninth century.¹²

Particularly, Shulan 述瀾, Abaoji's uncle, was appointed to the post of *yüyüe* 于越, the most powerful position next to the khaghan in the confederation, whose responsibility encompassed both civil and military realms, including the supreme command of the entire confederation force. He proved to be a brilliant commander and led the Khitan army into numerous victories over their neighboring tribes¹³ Shulan did not stop at plundering the conquered tribes but endeavored to utilize the newly incorporated population according to their talents and skills, whose constructive strategy Abaoji later continued to follow.

There is no doubt that the sudden prosperity of the Yila was due to their increased military capability. Choi argued that it was not a mere coincidence that the Yelü family

¹² LS 2:24. A partial translation of these passages is available in Wittfogel Feng, 149.

¹³ The list of the tribes that he conquered runs long, which includes the powerful tribes of Shiwei, Yüjüe in the north and Yi, Ding and two different groups of the Xi tribes. Two Xi tribes referred to in this context are written with entirely different characters. One group of the Xi tribes is described in *Jiu Tangshu* to have originally dwelled in the north of the Khitan tribes. The other tribe is said to have shared the common ancestry with the Khitan, both of whom had been broken off from the Yuwen branch of the Xianbei in the fourth century. Therefore, they are said to have been closely related to each other. See Wittfogel and Feng, 149. For the description of the early Xi and the Khitan tribes, see Wei Shou et al. eds., *Wei Shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 100:2221-4.

emerged as the new military powerhouse in the late ninth century. On the contrary it was the result of their conscious effort by adopting a successful strategy of making alliances through marriage with the Uighur elements in the tribes, particularly the clan of Empress Chunqin, later named Xiao.¹⁴ As we shall see below, the members of Empress Chunqin's family, including the empress herself, were extremely talented warriors and strategists, who provided indispensable support for Abaoji in establishing himself as the absolute and permanent ruler of the Khitan confederation. They also assisted him in constructing an empire modeled after the Chinese dynasties.

When Abaoji took over the supreme leadership of the Khitan confederation from the last khaghan from the Yaolian clan in 907, he declared himself emperor and his wife empress for the first time. In 916, as Abaoji adopted a Chinese style reign title, Shence, her title was formally changed to Empress Yingtian. This is the name by which she is better known in Chinese histories than her posthumous title of Chunqin. Prior to her husband's accession, she is said to have helped him with removing his political rivals within and without his tribe to secure his position. After the establishment of the dynasty, she continued to provide her support by frequently accompanying him in his foreign military campaigns, commanding her personal standing army. She participated in the court audience in an open manner, received foreign envoys with her husband, and advised him on the imminent domestic and diplomatic issues. When Abaoji suddenly died in 926 away from the capital in amidst of a campaign, he had just completed conquering the kingdom of Bohai. Empress Chunqin, who had accompanied her husband to the location,

¹⁴ Ik-jou Choi, 79-80.

took over the conduct of government and declined to obey the traditional custom of following her husband to death. Although Abaoji had formally designated his eldest son, Bei (900-937), as heir apparent, she had no intention of honoring her late husband's wish.¹⁵ She disapproved of Bei and pressured him to give up his claims in favor of her second son, Deguang 德光 (temple name Taizong 太宗). Upon his accession, Taizong (r. 926-947) honored his mother with the new title of empress dowager. She remained the most powerful figure in the Liao court throughout the second reign. However, she failed to engineer another imperial succession to her favor when Taizong died unexpectedly in 947 on his way back to the Liao capital from his military campaign in China.¹⁶ Her plan to enthrone her youngest son, Lihu 李胡, was frustrated due to the lack of support from the Khitan nobles. The eldest son of the original heir apparent of Taizu, Yüan 阮 (Shizong 世宗; reigned 947-51) was declared as the new emperor and she reluctantly granted her approval. This was the turning point of her career. Suspicious of her intention, Shizong remained vigilant and sent her to an exile to Zuzhou 祖州, where the mausoleum of Taizu was located. She spent the rest of her life there uneventfully until she died at the age of seventy five in 953 during the reign of the fourth

¹⁵ See the biography of Yelü Bei in LS 72:1209-1211.

¹⁶ The purpose of the campaign was to destroy the Khitan puppet regime of Later Jin and to punish its ruler Shi Zhonggui 石重貴 (Chudi 出帝; reigned 942-946), who offended his Khitan master. It is said that Empress Dowager Chunqin was decidedly against this campaign and advised the emperor not to engage. However, Taizong was so angered at Shi Zhonggui that he ignored his mother's insight and decided to pursue his plan of overthrowing the unruly state. Conquering the capital of Later Jin was achieved rather swiftly. However, Taizong was not ready to deal with many complicated issues of governing a Chinese state. Soon the Khitan army became the vulnerable target of guerilla attacks of the remnants of the Jin loyalists and the peasant rebels. In addition to that, Taizong could not bear the hot and humid climate and eventually decided to retreat. On his return home, he is said to have admitted the difficulty in ruling the Chinese. For the summary of the campaign, see Twitchett and Tietze, 70-75; LS 4:57-61.

emperor Muzong 穆宗 (r. 951-969). She was buried in the mausoleum with her husband and bestowed upon with the posthumous title, Zhenlie 貞烈, which was to be later replaced with Chunqin in 1052 during the reign of Xingzong 興宗 (r. 1031-1055).

The Role of Empress Chunqin during the Period of Consolidation

There is no doubt that Abaoji was a man of exceptional military talent and charisma for he was already made commander of the personal guards of the khaghan before he reached the age of thirty.¹⁷ In 901 he was made a chieftain of the Yila tribe, succeeding his father. In the same year Hendejin, the last khaghan from the Yaolian clan, began his term as the new Khitan leader.¹⁸ Abaoji had gradually built up a reputation as a competent military commander by scoring a number of successful raids against the Chinese border towns and by conquering various neighboring tribes. In 902 he was particularly successful in raiding the two Chinese cities which yielded numerous captives and animals.¹⁹ In the following year, he was appointed to *yüyüe*, the very office his aforementioned uncle Shulan held, largely due to his successful raid the year before. Military aggressions against the neighboring tribes continued and he began to take a keen interest in the political situations in China, where the central authority of the Tang government

¹⁷ Twitchett and Tietze, 57.

¹⁸ Hedeqin Khaghan in the *Liaoshi* is known in Chinese histories including *History of Five Dynasties* (*Wu dai shi*) and *Tang shu* with his alternative name, Qinde.

¹⁹ In 902, Abaoji led an attack on villages in Hedong and Daibei regions, which yielded a large sum of spoils including ninety-five thousand captives and a herd of more than a hundred-thousand. See LS 1:2. The governor of Hedong at the time was the famous Shato-Türk general named Li Keyong. See Wittfogel and Feng, 573; Twitchett and Tietze, 57-8.

collapsed and the power struggle among the independent and powerful governor-generals was intensifying.²⁰

Despite the inconsistencies of the sources on the dates of the early events of the Liao history, it is probably not far from the truth that Abaoji became the supreme leader of the Khitans sometime around 907.²¹ It is impossible to figure out the exact circumstances surrounding the leadership transfer from Hendejin, the last Yaolian khaghan, to Abaoji, since the *Liaoshi* and Chinese histories do not coincide with each other in their description of the event. According to the *Liaoshi*, Abaoji was chosen by Hedejin himself as the new leader of the Khitan confederation at the end of 906, as the latter was laying on his deathbed. At the request of the tribal leaders who wished to honor the last order of the incumbent leader, Abaoji refused it humbly three times and reluctantly accepted it.²² As soon as he ascended the position, he elevated his title to emperor and that of his wife to empress in the first month of 907.²³ The death of Hendejin, however, along with the account on his designation of Abaoji as his heir, occurs only in the *Liaoshi* and no other sources, which makes the verification impossible. It is very likely a fabrication. According to a Chinese source, Hendejin was not only very much alive, but also remained influential in the Khitan society after his term was over,

²⁰ Twitchett and Tietze, 58-9.

²¹ The *Liaoshi* claims that he ascended the throne as the first emperor in 907, while *Xin Wudaishi* suggests that Abaoji was appointed as the new khaghan replacing the previous one, Hedeqin, in that year. See LS 1:3 and 10; XWDS 72:886-7. Also see Twitchett and Tietze, 60.

²² LS 1:2.

²³ LS 1:3.

since he is said to have accompanied Abaoji on a tributary mission to the court of Later Liang 後梁 (907-923) in 908.²⁴

According to *New History of Five Dynasties*, Abaoji was elected as the new leader in 907 by the tribal council, which consisted of the eight chieftains from the powerful tribes in the confederation. The members of the council were not satisfied with the passive and weak measures adopted by the current khaghan, Hedejin, particularly with his dealings with the powerful governor-general of Lulong Province, Liu Rengong.²⁵ Liu Rengong, who had been governing Lulong Province since 895, devised an effective strategy in curtailing the frequent Khitan border incursions and plunder. With his elite cavalry, he would penetrate deep into the Khitan territory in the fall and burnt the pastureland, which caused a severe damage to the Khitan herd. Hedejin was reduced to a means of offering Liu Rengong a large sum of bribe in kind, thousands of fine Khitan horses with his vow not to invade the Lulong territory, in order to secure the pastureland. The Khitan tribal council deemed such a policy as humiliating and decided to replace him with Abaoji, whose reputation as a competent *yüiyüe* was well-established by that time.²⁶ Both old and new editions of *History of Five Dynasties* describe that the supreme leadership position of the Khitan confederation during the pre-dynastic period was not

²⁴ *Zizhi Tongjian* cites a source called Pianyilu 編遺錄, which is no longer extant. It contains a passage which reads as follows. “The Khitan King Abaoji and the former king Qinde visited the court to pay a tribute in the second year of Kaiping.” ZT 266:8678. Dennis Twitchett argued that the *Liaoshi* account on Hedejin’s death in 906 was a falsification. See Twitchett and Tietze, 58-9, footnote no. 10. Later Liang was one of the five short lived dynasties established by Zhu Wen (852-912). Zhu Wen was a powerful warlord based in northern Henan, who engineered succession and assassination of the last two Tang emperors, Zhaozhong and Ai Di, respectively, before he proclaimed himself the emperor of newly established dynasty of Later Liang. See F.W. Mote, *Imperial China 900-1800*, 12.

²⁵ XWDS 72:886

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

meant to be held by an individual permanently. As late as the beginning of the tenth century, the Khitan leadership transfer was certainly not regulated by the principles of patriline. Primogeniture was not a consideration, quite to the contrary of the Chinese rulership succession. Although it appears to have been possible for one powerful clan to dominate the leadership for a lengthy period of time, just as the Yaolian clan is said to have done from the mid-eighth to the end of the ninth century, the succession was by no means automatic.²⁷ Instead, the Khitan had adopted the strategy of electing a qualified leader within a limited pool of candidates, which was widely shared by many peoples of North Asian steppes. The tribal representatives would regularly hold intra-tribal meetings to elect one of them as new leader or to grant an extension of the term of the incumbent leader.²⁸ Although an illustrious genealogy was one of the important prerequisites for a candidate, it by no means guaranteed his automatic succession to the position until his personal achievements, measured largely by military victories, and his charisma were acknowledged by the fellow tribal leaders.²⁹

Old History of Five Dynasties specifies that the term for the Khitan supreme leadership was fixed for three years. Once every three years the chieftains of the eight powerful tribes would gather to elect one of them as their next leader. But they did not always elect a new one. They could give permission to the incumbent ruler to extend his

²⁷ Twitchett and Tietze, 51; Wittfogel and Feng, 398-404; Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 45-52.

²⁸ Many pastoral-nomadic communities in Eurasian steppes are known to have had similar institution of intra-tribal meetings. The Mongols called theirs *Khuriltai*, which is best known among all.

²⁹ Twitchett and Tietze, 52-3.

term, if he proved himself to be a capable and effective one.³⁰ *New History of Five Dynasties* further explains the circumstances under which a leader should be dismissed and replaced. They included situations such as that the incumbent had already been serving the position too long or if a natural calamity or an epidemic struck the Khitan tribes. When the leadership transfer occurred, the ousted leader was expected to willingly accept the decision of the tribal council without expressing remorse and discontent.³¹

Once Abaoji assumed the supreme leadership, he had no desire to step down. His intention was clearly manifested when he declared himself emperor as soon as he was elected as the Khitan ruler in 907. His ambition to rule permanently, however, was not to be easily accomplished without going through a series of struggles for the following decade. His first obstacle was the very tribal council who had elected him as ruler. A few years into Abaoji's term, they began to suspect his intention. So they demanded him to yield himself to the reelection procedure. As for the events that followed the reproach of the council, *New History of Five Dynasties* offers the most violent and detailed version. It is particularly interesting since it attributes Empress Chunqin as the mastermind behind the tactic employed by Abaoji in eliminating his rivals. The story goes as follows:

“At the time, due to the cruelty of Liu Shouguang, many people from Youzhou 幽州 and Zhuozhou 涿州(modern Zhuo District in Hebei Province) fled (their home) to seek protection from the Khitan. Abaoji took advantage of this opportunity and raided the border areas. He

³⁰ JWDS 137:828.

³¹ *New History of Five Dynasties (XWDS)*, however, does not explicitly state that the length of the supreme leadership term was fixed for three years. The Khitan principle of leadership transmission is the subject which is not entirely agreed upon among scholars. See XWDS 72:886.

attacked the cities and took numerous people as captives. He built walled cities modeled after the Tang prefectures and counties so that (the captured) people could settle in. The Chinese taught Abaoji that in China, kings were never replaced. Since then, Abaoji increasingly applied force to restrain the tribes and did not wish to step down. Nine years passed since he assumed the leadership and all the tribes equally criticized him for ruling for so long and not wanting to yield. At their request, Abaoji reluctantly passed on his banner and drum but asked the tribes, “I ruled for nine years and was able to obtain many Chinese subjects. I wish to establish a separate tribe to establish Chinese City (Hancheng 漢城). Will that be allowed?” The tribes approved of it.

Chinese City was set up along River Luan (Luan He 滦河) in the southeast of Mountain Tan (Tan shan 炭山) and benefited from salt and iron. This was Huayan 滑鹽 County of Later Wei Dynasty.³² The soil was good for agriculture and Abaoji encouraged the Chinese to engage in farming. With construction of walls around the town, houses and market places, the city looked just like the structure of Yuzhou. The Chinese were happy and did not again think of returning (to their homeland). Abaoji realized that people could be utilized.

Taking advice from his wife, Shulu, he sent out a messenger to all the chieftains of the tribes with a message saying, “I own the salt lake, from which all the tribes eat (the salt). Although you know how to appreciate the benefit of salt consumption, you do not recognize that it has an owner. How can this be? You should offer me compensation.” The tribal leaders considered his demand reasonable and all went to meet (him) at the salt lake with cattle and wine. Abaoji had already arranged soldiers in ambush in the lake area. When they were getting merrily drunk, the ambushed soldiers suddenly arose and killed all the tribal leaders. Thereupon, Abaoji established himself as the (permanent) ruler and was never replaced.”³³

³² For Abaoji’s Chinese City (Hancheng), see Yao Cungwu, “Shuo Abaoji shidai di Hancheng 設阿保機時代的漢城”, in *Dongbeishi luncong* 東北史論叢 (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1959), Vol. 1, 193-216. See also Sechin Jagchid, “The Kitans and Their Cities”, *Central Asiatic Journal* 25 (1981):70-88.

³³ XWTS 72:886-887. Almost identical version can be also found in *Qidan Guozhi* 23:2a. Sima Guang’s *Zizhi Tongjian* simply records that Abaoji attacked and destroyed the seven tribes and annexed the whole nation without giving the details. See ZT 266:8678-9.

This is the earliest incident, recorded in histories, in which Empress Chunqin played a visible role as Abaoji's political strategist. The authenticity of the details of this incident, however, has been doubted by some Khitan experts, including Simada Masao and Kim Jaeman, who speculated that many fictitious elements were added to create a dramatic story. They still admitted a possibility that it had been based upon some factual information.³⁴ Even though we are cautious not to take the account of "the salt lake massacre" literally, it is perfectly reasonable to conclude that Abaoji resorted to force in crushing the challenges from other tribal chieftains, who demanded him to relinquish his leadership. Although the dates of the affairs described above are not certain, the traditional authority wielded by the tribal council was practically canceled for good. With or without the incident of the salt lake, Empress Chunqin must have been actively involved in consolidating her husband's position as the absolute ruler from the beginning of the latter's career, since she is said to have been an excellent military commander who maintained her personal army. The sources, including the *Liaoshi*, are far from being explicit about the events of the first few years of Abaoji's reign. The roles played by her two brothers, however, are described in a clearer manner when Abaoji was faced with another set of contenders, a few years later. This time the challenge came from the members of his clan and it posed a far more serious threat to him than that from outsiders. Abaoji must have received considerable military support from his brothers and other paternal relatives in the Yelü clan, when he had to eliminate his rivals from other

³⁴ Shimada Masao, *Ryodai Shakaishi kenkyu* (Tokyo: Sanwa shobo, 1968), 103-4; Cho Myunghee, "Keoran Tae-jo-bi Sun-heum huang-hu-e dae-han yeon-gu 契丹太祖妃淳欽皇后에 對한 研究", M.A. thesis (Dongguk University 1978), 13.

powerful tribes in the council a few years earlier. His clansmen, particularly his younger brothers, collaborated with him most likely because they expected to take over the leadership from their elder brother in due time.³⁵ Their expectation was natural and justified from the perspective of the time-honored Khitan tradition in which the leadership was frequently transmitted fraternally as well as collaterally.³⁶ The pattern of succession of the chieftainship in the Yila tribe since the time of Suzu, great-great grandfather of Abaoji, clearly supports their claim. I have remarked earlier that the lineal inheritance and monopoly of power by a single lineage within a clan were not the norm among the Khitan of the early dynastic period. Such concepts were still very much foreign to them.

When Abaoji reached the end of his initial three year term in 910, Abaoji's brothers and relatives came to a realization that Abaoji was not intending on yielding his position to any of them.³⁷ They were not, however, ready to give up their claims and accept the lifelong tenure of Abaoji. The following year, four of his younger brothers, Lage 刺葛, Diela, Yindeshi, and Anduan, conspired a revolt.³⁸ But it was discovered before it was carried out, since the wife of Anduan, Nianmugu, had betrayed their plan to Abaoji.³⁹ Interestingly, none of his brothers received punishment. They were pardoned

³⁵ See Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship" 45-7.

³⁶ See the diagram of the early Yila leadership transfer in Wittfogel and Feng, 399.

³⁷ Twitchett and Tietze, 60-2; Chen Shu, "Lun Qidan zhi xuanhan dahui yu diwei jicheng", 418-442.

³⁸ See LS 1:6. Out of five younger brothers of Abaoji, the only one who never participated in the attempts to revolt was Su 蘇. He was in fact half-brother of Abaoji and was the youngest of all. He was later appointed Southern Prime Minister in 921 and held the post until his death in 926. Wittfogel and Feng, 440.

³⁹ Nianmugu was rewarded with an honorary title of Lady of Jin for her role as informer. See LS 1:5; Wittfogel and Feng, 411; Twitchett and Tietze, 62.

after Abaoji performed a ritual of sacrificing animals in their place. Lage, the eldest of his younger brothers, was even given the post of the chieftain (*yilijin*) of the Yila tribe.⁴⁰ Considering that Abaoji himself served the post a few years earlier, this appointment was a deliberate scheme of Abaoji to appease Lage by giving the latter the impression that he was considered as the imperial successor.⁴¹

Soon Lage became disillusioned. He plotted another ill-fated conspiracy with his brothers to usurp Abaoji in the following year. Once again, they were pardoned.⁴² The annals in the *Liaoshi* explain that Abaoji's deep sympathy and love for his brothers was the reason for the repeated pardon.⁴³ But this is highly unlikely. It is more accurate to say that Abaoji did not dare to execute his brothers because he was still bound by the Khitan tribal tradition to a considerable degree. He acknowledged the legitimacy of the claims of his brothers.⁴⁴

In 913, in the sixth year of Abaoji's reign, a more serious revolt broke out. It was the largest in scale ever, involving not only his brothers but also his uncle, Xiadi 轄底, and his cousin. Xiadi came from more prominent lineage within the Yelü clan than that of Taizu as son of Tiela 帖剌, brother of Abaoji's grandfather, Xüanzu.⁴⁵ Tiela is said to have served as chieftain of the Yila tribe at least nine times. Xiadi himself led an illustrious career. He succeeded his father as the Yila chieftain and later he was

⁴⁰ LS 1:6.

⁴¹ Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 46.

⁴² LS 1:6-7.

⁴³ LS 2:24.

⁴⁴ Twitchett and Tietze, 62.

⁴⁵ See Yelü Xiadi's biography in LS 112:1498. A partial translation of this biography is available by Wittfogel and Feng in 412.

appointed to *yüyüie* when Abaoji became the Khitan leader in 907. Considering his achievement as well as his seniority in the clan, it is not difficult to imagine his discontent with Abaoji's prolonged occupation of the supreme leadership. He must have perceived that he was better qualified than Abaoji and that his turn to rule was past due.⁴⁶

It took almost three months for Abaoji to suppress the revolt. He entrusted the grave task to two brothers of his wife, Xiao Dilu and Xiao Aguzhi. They personally led the elite cavalry unit and rigorously pursued the rebels to capture the two major antagonists, Lage and Yindeshi. Empress Chunqin also participated very actively in fighting the rebels to protect the throne. As soon as the revolt broke out, Lage and Yindeshi sent his troops to attack and destroy the imperial camp. It was the empress who swiftly acted to prevent the imperial insignia from falling into the hands of the rebels.⁴⁷ At one point she was in charge of holding the defenses of the dangerous mountain paths at Hei Shan 黑山 (Black Mountain).⁴⁸

When the revolt was successfully put down, Abaoji again pardoned all of his brothers with relatively minor penalty of beating, while all other offenders, including Xiadi and his son, were ordered to be executed.⁴⁹ However, this did not prevent Lage, this time with his son, from making another attempt to revolt in 917, which ended in an

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁷ LS 1:6-7.

⁴⁸ This author is not entirely sure where Hei Shan was located. According to Karl Wittfogel, it is possible that it is identical with Heiling, a mountain in the northwest of modern Jilin Province. See Wittfogel and Feng, 558, footnote no. 137.

⁴⁹ See LS 1:9; LS 112:1498; Wittfogel and Feng, 412-3. The court interrogated more than three hundred people for allegedly being involved in the rebellion. Lage and Diela were identified as the principal offenders but were released only after receiving a penalty of beating. Yindeshi and Anduan were exempted from any penalty.

immediate failure. He fled to avoid any possible retribution from his brother.⁵⁰ In the following year, Diela's conspiracy was uncovered prior to its execution. He was pardoned on an interesting condition that wife of his younger brother, Yindeshi, would be sacrificed in his place.⁵¹ This was the last attempt of Abaoji's brothers to usurp the throne.

It has been suggested that a series of institutional changes introduced by Abaoji during the year 916 must have triggered the two last revolts.⁵² It was a significant year for Abaoji from the perspective of consolidating his position. According to the Khitan tradition, it was the year when his third term as a ruler was to reach an end, which means that he had to yield to the tribal reelection procedure. Naturally he had no desire to go down that path. Instead he performed a solemn ceremony to proclaim himself as "heavenly emperor" and adopted a Chinese-style reign title.⁵³ Then he took another step forward that provoked his brothers even more. He formally designated his eldest son, Bei 倍, as heir apparent.⁵⁴ Moreover, he expressed his wish to honor Confucius as the Khitan national sage and ordered a Confucian shrine to be constructed in which the heir apparent could perform the worship of the sage. Promotion of Confucius was a part of his deliberate scheme to justify the Chinese ideas of lineal succession and primogeniture that

⁵⁰ Youzhou was the center of the state Later Jin where he lived until died in 923.

⁵¹ The *Liaoshi* explains that this was because Abaoji hated Nieligun, the wife of Yindeshi, and demanded that she be killed instead of Diela. Wittfogel and Feng, 413

⁵² Wittfogel and Feng, 401-2; Twitchett and Titze, 62-3.

⁵³ LS 1:10-11; Twitchett and Titze, 63. The reign title was Shence 神冊 and his full title was 大聖大明天皇帝 and the empress was renamed as 應天大明地皇后.

⁵⁴ Bei's Khitan name was Duyu 圖欲. Although he never actually ruled, he was given a temple name, Yizong. See his biography, LS 72:1209.

were newly adopted by him to replace the tribal inheritance system.⁵⁵ The message was clear to his brothers and agnates. Their claims to the throne were officially annulled. However, by this time, the power of Abaoji's brothers seems to have been considerably weakened, since the last two revolts were not organized well enough to create a serious crisis for Abaoji and were quickly suppressed.⁵⁶ After Lage, the leader of almost all of the rebellions, fled to China upon the failure of his last revolt in 917, the remaining brothers lacked sufficient coordination.⁵⁷

Abaoji relied on his military superiority in maintaining his authority, which derived largely from the distinctive Liao military apparatus that he created. His personal protection was entrusted to a special elite army called, "Palace Guards (*gongwei* 宮衛)", which originally consisted of a small number of mounted soldiers who had been carefully selected from all across the Khitan tribes.⁵⁸ This intra-tribal army was later expanded and developed into a unique military-administrative system of *ordo* (*woluduo* 斡魯朵), attached with a number of administrative districts and the tribal units. During peaceful times, they were stationed at the imperial residence to protect the emperor and escorted him when traveling. Should there be military emergencies, they were to be quickly mobilized, ready for the immediate deployment. After the emperor passed away, they

⁵⁵ Wittfogel and Feng, 400; LS 72:1209.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁷ Lage was initially received well by Li Cunxü, the ruler of the Jin at the time. Lage was even given an official post until he was killed by Li Cunxü in 923, who intended to please Abaoji. Li was the son of the aforementioned Shato-Türk governor-general of Hedong (northern part of modern Shanxi), Li Keyong (d. 908). See Twitchett and Titze, 62.

⁵⁸ *Gongwei* is also referred to as *Suwei* (宿衛), which literally means "guards of the emperor's nocturnal rest". See LS 73:1224-5; Wittfogel and Feng, 509.

were to guard his mausoleum.⁵⁹ Subsequently, all the succeeding Liao emperors established their own *ordo* guards. Except the emperors, there were only four more extraordinarily powerful individuals from the imperial household, who established their personal *ordo*. Two of them were Empress Chunqin and Empress Chengtian, wife of Emperor Jingzong.⁶⁰ Their *ordos* were maintained separate and independent from those of their husbands and sons. We will return to this issue for further discussion later.

Throughout his reign Abaoji thoroughly trusted his wife and his affinal relatives with the matters concerning military and shunned from granting his brothers and close agnates with the important offices in the Khitan military. Although there was no more internal crisis instigated by the imperial brothers and clansmen during the last decade of his reign, Abaoji remained suspicious of them. In terms of functions, there was no clear separation between the military and civil administration in the Liao government, particularly during the early dynastic years. For instance, Northern Prime Minister oversaw both civil and military officials in the bureaucracy and was the last official for the emperor to consult with before making policies.⁶¹ Contrary to the description of the *Liaoshi* on this office, in reality it was reserved permanently for the Xiao clan.⁶² The precedent was set up when

⁵⁹ LS 35:402. The partial translation is provided in Wittfogel and Feng, 540. The origin of *gongwei* is described in LS 31:362; LS 35:402. According to the *Liaoshi*, it was initially established as his “heart and belly (*xinfu* 心腹)” guards, whose duty was to protect the imperial camp day and night. It must have been consisted of the Khitan tribesmen in the beginning, but other ethnic elements were added later, such as Chinese and Bohai. The unit, which was originally purely military, went through a great transformation into an administrative unit when a large number of households and the local districts were later attached to them to sustain them. Wittfogel and Feng, 540-1.

⁶⁰ For further information on other Khitan individuals who kept their own *ordos*, see Wittfogel and Feng, 510.

⁶¹ LS 45:690.

⁶² The *Liaoshi* describes that Northern Prime Minister was supposed to be reserved for the imperial clansmen while the consort clan members had the claims on the office of Southern Prime Minister,

all three brothers of Empress Chunqin were appointed to the post in succession with a guarantee that their descendants could claim it through hereditary succession (shixuan 世選). In 907, Xiao Shilu initially held the post until it was transferred to his younger brother Xiao Dilu in 910. Upon Dilu's death in 918, the youngest brother of the empress, Xiao Aguzhi, inherited the office.⁶³ Years later Dilu's son, Xiao Han also served this office under Shizong. In addition to that, the command of the Imperial Guards was first entrusted to the brothers of Empress Chunqin, until her nephew, Yelü Laogu, was appointed to the position as a reward for his meritorious service in pacifying the rebellion led by Lage in 913.⁶⁴

To summarize, from the very beginning of Abaoji's career, he relied heavily on the military support from his wife and her brothers. They played an absolutely indispensable role in defending the political authority of Abaoji by quelling successive revolts staged by the imperial brothers and agnates. In exchange for their dedication and loyalty, they were bestowed with the hereditary claims to the most powerful offices in the Liao bureaucracy. In addition to their political privileges, the Xiao family secured the exclusive and permanent liens of providing spouses for the imperial family. Xiao Shilu, brother or half brother of Empress Chunqin, for instance, married Princess Zhigu 質古, the only daughter of Taizu and Empress Chunqin.⁶⁵ On the other hand, Xiao Shilu's daughter married the second son of Taizu, who succeeded his father as Emperor

who was in charge of governing the southern sector of the empire which was mostly populated by the Chinese.

⁶³ LS 1:3-4 and 13.

⁶⁴ Yelü Lage was the son of Empress Yingtian's sister. See his biography in LS 73:1224-5.

⁶⁵ LS 65:999.

Taizong.⁶⁶ Needless to say, the hereditary succession and exclusive marriage exchange were implemented in order to ensure the direct access to the key offices in the government for the members of the empress' family so that they could continue their monopoly of power and privileges generation after generation.

Empress Chunqin as Political and Military Strategist

Biography

There is no doubt that Empress Chunqin was a highly competent military commander. I have remarked briefly on the fact that Empress Chunqin sustained her own *Ordo*. It was named Prolonged Peace Camp (*Changninggong* 長寧宮) with thirteen thousand households attached, which consisted of both the tribal and Chinese population and generated five thousand mounted soldiers directly under her command.⁶⁷ In addition, she maintained another special cavalry called Precious Coral Army (*shushan jun* 屬珊軍). Although the *Liaoshi* records that it was created in 926, upon the completion of Bohai conquest, its proto-type had been almost certainly in existence since the beginning of Abaoji's reign, or even earlier, since it is said that she had frequently assisted her husband in the military expeditions commanding her own army. Like Imperial Guards, it was originally comprised of the talented soldiers selected from various Khitan tribes.

⁶⁶ She was canonized as Empress Jingan 靖安皇后. See her biography, LS 71:1200.

⁶⁷ Another name for the camp was *Pusuwan* 蒲速碗, which was transliterated from the Khitan word meaning "development", according to the *Liaoshi*. It was established in Xinmin County in Liaoning in present day. See Wittfogel and Feng, 543; LS 31:365; LS 35:402-3.

Later skillful Chinese and Bohai soldiers and captives were added to the unit.⁶⁸ The *Liaoshi* claims that its size was fairly large with two hundred thousand soldiers.⁶⁹ Perhaps with this army she helped crushing the rebellions of Abaoji's brothers.⁷⁰ This special army was likely to have been mobilized when she was in charge of holding the defenses of the empire in an event of a foreign attack, or domestic crisis when her husband was engaged in other military actions abroad. When Abaoji was away from the capital pacifying Dangxiang and other Türkic tribes in the west in 916, some of the Shiwei tribes took advantage of his absence and rebelled. They underestimated, however, the ability of the empress who was left with the responsibility of the defense. According to her biography, she predicted their attack and was fully prepared when the enemy struck. She quickly defeated them.⁷¹

She was not only a good commander but also an excellent strategist. She always joined her husband in planning the military campaigns and freely offered her criticism and advice for Abaoji in the process. Her great contribution in planning and personal participation in the operations to conquer Bohai in 926 is well noted in the *Liaoshi*.⁷² A few years earlier, according to her biography, she admonished Abaoji for pursuing in

⁶⁸ The army was named Shushan because it was as "precious as coral". See Wittfogel and Feng, 143; LS 46:738.

⁶⁹ LS 35:402; Wittfogel and Feng, 149. This figure from the *Liaoshi*, however, was considered by Karl Wittfogel too large to be true. He thought the number was not reliable since other Chinese sources like *Qidan Guozhi* and *Song Huiyao* 宋會要稿 suggest only twenty or thirty thousand. See Wittfogel and Feng, 521, footnote no. 217, and 549, footnote no. 77 and 81; LS 35:401-2.

⁷⁰ Jennifer Holmgren suggested that this must have been the army that Xiao Dilu led against the rebels to capture Lage. See Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 47.

⁷¹ LS 71:1199. Abaoji was pacifying the Dangxiang tribes in the west when the two branches of Shiwei, Yellow Head (Huangtou) and Choubai, namely, launched an attack.

⁷² LS 71:1200.

vain his ambition of conquering Yüzhou 幽州, after having failed repeatedly.⁷³ In 916 and 917, Abaoji attempted to intervene in China by taking advantage of the conflict between the two most powerful figures in North China, Later Liang 後梁(907-923) emperor, Zhu Yuzhen (Modi), and Li Cunxü 李存勳 (885-926), ruler of Jin 晉, but was defeated and chased off by the Jin army led by Li Siyuan 李嗣源.⁷⁴ In 921, once again, Abaoji, lured by the regional governor at the time, Lu Munjin 盧文進, was determined to attack Yüzhou. Empress Chunqin was against his plan and tried to talk him out of it. She sharply criticized him for underestimating the military might of Li Cunxü and warned him of the disastrous consequences, if the mission failed.⁷⁵ The empress' concern was reasonable. She thought that Abaoji should have focused on maintaining internal stability because it was too soon to engage in a large scale military venture after suppressing the rebellions led by his brothers only a few years earlier.⁷⁶ Abaoji, however, did not heed her advice and went ahead with his plan, personally leading thirty thousand soldiers.⁷⁷ The assessment of Empress Chunqin turned out to be correct. The initial victories of Abaoji's army were quickly overturned and the Khitans were thoroughly defeated by Li Cunxü's army of a mere five thousand. Abaoji survived but lost most of his men.

⁷³ See Twitchett and Tietze, 64; JWDS 137:1828-9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁵ ZT 271:8870; LS 71:1200; JWDS 137:1828-9.

⁷⁶ Ik-jou Choi, 17-8.

⁷⁷ *Jiu wudai shi (JWDS)* suggests that some said that the size of the Khitan army was larger, to 50,000. Refer to no. 67.

A very similar event is recorded to have occurred during the reign of the second emperor, Taizong, again involving the issue of intervening in China. When the new ruler of Later Jin 後晉(936-946), a Khitan puppet state, defied the suzerainty of Taizong in 942, Taizong was outraged and decided to embark on a punitive military campaign to annihilate the Jin.⁷⁸ Empress Dowager Chunqin was, once again, advised against the idea. She preferred a peaceful reconciliation with the Jin to a costly war.⁷⁹ It seems that in overall she was focused on maintaining the internal stability and prosperity of the Khitan tribes and was not interested in initiating unnecessary military interventions in China. It is possible that her viewpoint represented the majority of conservative Khitan aristocrats, who were deeply rooted in their tribal traditions and remained suspicious of interfering in Chinese politics.

As a completely devoted and obedient son, Taizong never failed to consult his mother on all the matters of government and military.⁸⁰ However, this time, he decided to ignore his mother's warning and decided to invade. After suffering a major defeat during the first few months of the battle, eventually the Khitan army prevailed and conquered the Jin capital, Bian 汴 in 946.⁸¹ Their victory and occupation of the capital turned out to be ephemeral. After only three months, Taizong was forced to abandon the region as popular resentment and guerilla-style attacks on the Khitan army intensified.

⁷⁸ Twitchett and Tietze, 73-4. The new ruler was Chudi 出帝 (Shi Zhonggui 石重貴, r. 942-6). He was the nephew of the famous Shato-Türk general, Shi Jingtang (892-942), who founded the dynasty.

⁷⁹ See JWDS 137:1834; XWDS 72:895-6; Ik-jou Choi, 39.

⁸⁰ XWDS 72:892.

⁸¹ It refers to modern Kaifeng in Henan Province, which would later become the capital of the Northern Song dynasty.

On his way back home, he suddenly fell ill and died.⁸² The invasion was after all a completely ill-calculated venture that cost his life. It is said that he admitted he had made a mistake by invading China prior to his death.⁸³

Besides military affairs, Empress Chunqin assumed a very active role in governing the state almost as a co-ruler. Her authority in the Liao court was recognized in an open and visible manner, unlike that of her counterparts in native Chinese dynasties, where an imperial consort or an empress-dowager was expected to follow the custom of attending the court audience behind a screen. Yao Kun, an envoy from the Later Tang emperor, Mingzong, to the Khitan court, later recorded that Empress Chunqin was present sitting across from her husband in the imperial tent, when he was granted an audience with the Khitan emperor and debated the diplomatic issues in 926.⁸⁴ It is also recorded in the sources that she was good at discovering talented men and recommending them for higher offices in the administration. For instance, it was she who first recognized the quality and integrity of Han Yanhui 韓延徽(d. 959). A former provincial official from Youzhou, Han Yanhui later became one of the most important Chinese administrators in the cabinet of Abaoji.⁸⁵ He was originally sent to the Khitan court as an envoy from Prince of Yan 燕, Liu Shouguang, who wished to seek military alliance from the Khitan against the mounting pressure from the formidable military

⁸² He died at his camp in Luancheng 樂城 in northern Hebei at the age of 46.

⁸³ LS 4:60.

⁸⁴ F. W. Mote, 45.

⁸⁵ Refer to Han Yanhui's biography in LS 74:1231-2. Also see Empress Chunqin's in LS 71:1199-1200.

power of the bordering state, the Later Jin.⁸⁶ When Han was granted audience with Abaoji, he refused to make an obeisance to him, which angered him greatly. Han was detained in the Khitan state and was made to herd horses. Observing Han closely, Empress Chunqin remonstrated with Abaoji explaining that his loyalty to his lord was a quality of a sage worth being praised and rewarded. She further urged him to treat Han with respect and to employ him. Abaoji heeded her advice. Her judgment and recommendation turned out to be very helpful. Abaoji at the time was in need of effective and appropriate administration system in order to govern the enlarged territory populated by various conquered peoples, particularly a large number of Chinese farmers. Han Yanhui, along with other Chinese officials who joined the Khitan government, contributed greatly in developing the system to administer the sedentary farming population in the south. He suggested that Abaoji build walled cities with marketplaces to for the Chinese to live in. He also devised a program of offering various incentives to encourage people to settle in the uncultivated frontier regions. According to his biography, the number of the Chinese who ran away from the Khitan rule was significantly reduced as a result of these measures.⁸⁷ He is also given credit for implementing the taxation system.⁸⁸

The case of Han Yanhui was hardly an exception. It seems that Empress Chunwin was very committed to the idea of fully utilizing the conquered subjects according to their skills. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, her special army

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁷ LS 74:1231; Twitchett and Tietze, 63-4.

⁸⁸ LS 59:926; Wittfogel and Feng, 112.

Shushan was largely constituted of Chinese soldiers and the Bohai captives who were transferred to her camp upon the completion of the Bohai conquest. She also pardoned the families of the Khitan noble criminal offenders, who were punished by serving as camp servitors in remote regions, to convert them to noble camp attendants.⁸⁹

In 925, Uighur envoys arrived at the Liao court and there was no one who could understand their language.⁹⁰ Therefore, Empress Chunqin suggested to Abaoji that Diela, one of his younger brothers, be sent to greet them since he was known to be gifted in learning. After being in their company for merely twenty days, Diela learned their spoken language as well as their script. Based upon the knowledge of the Uighur script, Diela later created the Small Khitan Script.⁹¹

Empress Chunqin was her husband's most trusted advisor and strategist. She enjoyed a great authority almost equivalent to her husband's. When Abaoji suddenly died in 926, she was given yet another opportunity to exert her power at will without restraints. As she immediately took over the conduct of government and military, she ruled as de facto ruler until the succession dispute was settled. Except for Lage, all of Abaoji's younger brothers were still alive. The dynasty that her husband had fought so

⁸⁹ Wittfogel and Feng, 226 and 514-5; LS 31:371. The *Liaoshi* records that during the reign of Hendejin Khaghan, a Yila chieftain named Puguzhi and others from three different lineages murdered Taizu's uncle, Shulu, who was serving as *yuyüe* at the time. Because of their crime, the families of the three lineages were taken away of their noble status and forced into the status of common servitors, attached to camps. Such camps that detained the peoples of various offenders were called *wali* 瓦里.

⁹⁰ Citing Shiratori, Karl Wittfogel speculated that this Uighur mission is identical to the one recorded in the section of the annals. See LS 2:20-1. The annals record that there were Uighur tributary missions on three different occasions in 924 and 925. Karl Wittfogel also thought that the mission described above must have happened on the fourth month of 925, since Abaoji was away from the capital throughout the whole year in 924 and most of 925 except in the fourth month, engaged in expedition in the western Mongolia. See Wittfogel and Feng, 243.

⁹¹ See Wittfogel and Feng, 243; LS 64:968. For further information on Large and Small Khitan scripts, also see Wittfogel and Feng, 243-253.

hard to consolidate during the last two decades was faced with the possibility of another internal crisis. Under this circumstance, she was determined to protect the claims of her own children to the throne from the potential challenges from the fraternal and collateral relatives of Abaoji. Although she agreed with her late husband on lineal transmission of power, she had a different opinion from him about which son should succeed the throne.

Her Later Years: The Reigns of Taizong and Shizong

Upon the death of Abaoji in the fall of 926, Empress Chunqin collected the Khitan armies and personally escorted the funeral procession back to Xilou (Upper Capital), as Yao Kun, the aforementioned Chinese envoy from the Later Tang, observed.⁹² When the time for his interment arrived, the *Liaoshi* claims, the empress insisted on being buried with her husband, but the imperial clansmen and the court officials persuaded her out of it. Hence, “she cut off her right hand at the wrist and placed it in his coffin.” Contemporary Chinese sources, such as *Qidan Guozhi* and *Zizhi tongjian*, present a slightly different version of the incident, in which she appeared rather reluctant to the idea of joining her husband in death. She sent hundreds of courtiers to be buried in her husband’s mausoleum on the pretext that she needed the messengers to deliver her words to the deceased emperor. When she was challenged by an upright official who urged her to follow her husband, she said, “It is not that I do not want to follow the emperor to underworld. However, I have young sons and a country without a ruler to take care of. I

⁹² F.W. Mote, 47; JWDS 137:1832.

simply cannot go.” Then she cut off her right arm and had it buried with her husband’s corpse.⁹³

It is not entirely clear whether the Khitan custom demanded widows of the chieftains and khaghans to accompany their deceased husbands in death. Certainly this is the only reference to the existence of such practice among the Khitans that we found in the primary sources.⁹⁴ A similar case is reported for the case of the Manchus, the ruling people of another conquest dynasty, Qing, during the incipient period of their regime. Abahai, senior widow of Nurgaci (1559-1626), the revered progenitor of the Manchu dynasty, is said to have been forced to follow her deceased husband to death because her potential influence in leadership succession procedure was greatly feared by the clansmen of Nurgaci.⁹⁵ The circumstances in which Empress Chunqin was being urged to sacrifice her life to fulfill the duty of a loyal wife are to a considerable degree similar. To her political rivals, mainly the members of the imperial clan, wifely duty seemed like a perfect pretext under which they could rid themselves of this formidable widow in order to prevent her from engineering the imperial succession in her favor and from purging her opponents. In any case, she defied it and eventually she was the one who prevailed. Although Taizu officially designated his eldest son, Bei, as heir apparent as early as 916, the empress had no desire to honor her deceased husband’s wish. In fact, throughout the dynastic period, pre-mortem designation of heir by the incumbent emperor was rarely

⁹³ QDGZ 13:1a-2b; ZT 275:9001; Wittfogel and Feng, 254. It was a Chinese official named Zhao Siwen who bravely urged her to accompany her deceased husband.

⁹⁴ It was customary for the wives of the Uighur Khaghans to be buried with their deceased husbands. See Colin Mackerras, “The Uighurs”, in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. Denis Snior, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 327.

⁹⁵ Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 134.

done.⁹⁶ The sources agree that the empress much favored her second son, Deguang, over Bei and was determined to push forward her plan to enthrone Deguang.⁹⁷ While imperial succession was being delayed by disputes for a several months since Taizu's death, it appears Empress Yingtian carried out a purge on a large scale to eliminate all the influential supporters of Bei, often under the pretext of "sending messengers to the deceased emperor".

It is certainly suspicious that three younger brothers of Abaoji died shortly before and after his death in the fall of 926. The second oldest younger brother, Diela, died five days prior to Taizu's death. In less than forty-eight days, Taizu's youngest brother, Su, who was serving as Southern Prime Minister, suddenly died.⁹⁸ The circumstances of the deaths of Diela and Su were not described in the *Liaoshi* except the case of Yindishi. Yindishi was personally entrusted by Taizu in deathbed to protect Bei and to see to his accession. He was assassinated on the orders of Empress Chunqin.⁹⁹ Considering that Diela was also assisting Bei in governing the newly annexed Bohai region, renamed as Kingdom of Dongdan 東丹國, it is possible that he was an ardent supporter of Bei, which made him the target of the empress dowager's purge.¹⁰⁰ If that was the case, it is not far fetched to speculate that Diela and Su were eliminated by Empress Chunqin as well. Otherwise, it is difficult to believe that three brothers, except Yindishi, died almost simultaneously of different natural causes. Scholars such as Jennifer Holmgren and Choi

⁹⁶ Only Shengzong and Daozong designated heir apparent during their lifetime.

⁹⁷ XWDS 72:891; ZT 275:8993.

⁹⁸ LS 2:23; Ik-jou Choi, 82.

⁹⁹ See LS 64:969; Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 53.

¹⁰⁰ Diela was serving as Left Prime Minister of Dongdan Kingdom.

Ik-jou have also expressed their skepticism in accepting the *Liaoshi* account of their natural deaths.¹⁰¹

In addition to the imperial brothers, a few influential officials were executed because they audaciously remonstrated with the empress dowager concerning the legitimacy of Bei's claims according to the principle of primogeniture.¹⁰² After standing opposite his mother for months after the death of his father, Bei finally gave in to the pressure. At the end of 926, Bei, accompanied by the courtiers, approached his mother and declared that he would voluntarily give up his claims in favor of his younger brother since the qualification of the latter was superior to that of his own.¹⁰³ Deguang, at the age of twenty four, immediately ascended the throne. Bei probably recognized that he was left with little option but to comply with his mother's will, knowing that his military power was no match for hers, especially after having lost most of his strong supporters. After the abdication, Bei still retained his title and authority as Prince of Dongdan until he fled to China in 930.¹⁰⁴

The reasons why the empress favored her second son over Bei are not explicitly explained in the sources. However, we can speculate that they were manifold.

¹⁰¹ Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 53; Ik-jou Choi, 82.

¹⁰² LS 2: 23. Yelü Dieli, the Southern Division Yilijin, argued that Bei was the legitimate heir to the throne due to his seniority and suffered a fate of torture and execution. See the biography of his son, Yelü Anduan in LS 77: 1259-1260. See also a partial translation of the biography in Wittfogel and Feng, 414.

¹⁰³ LS 3: 28; LS 72: 1220. Some scholars doubted that Bei was so willing in giving up his claims as the *Liaoshi* describes it. See Chen Shu, 428-9. See also Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 53, n. 46; Yao Cungwu, 260-1. ZT offers different story. See ZT 275: 8993.

¹⁰⁴ In a systematical attempt to reduce Bei's power, Taizong ordered a transfer of Bohai capital and a large portion of Bohai population to Dongping, a newly designated Southern Capital of the Liao. Thus, Dongdan state gradually lost its autonomous status. Bei was initially welcomed by the ruler of Later Tang, Mingzong. Bei lived comfortably under the patronage of Mingzong until he was murdered by Shi Jingtang in 930. See for further details Twitchett and Teizte, 69.

Deguang's martial quality was often pointed out as one of the major reasons why the empress favored him over Bei. Deguang accompanied his father and proved his capability in numerous military engagements, including the invasion of the Hebei region of China in 921 and the campaign against western tribes in 924.¹⁰⁵ His merit seems to have been well recognized since he was appointed to Grand Commander-in-Chief at the mere age of 20.¹⁰⁶ The fact that Deguang was equipped with exceptional valor and leadership on the battlefield must have worked to his advantage greatly in winning his mother's favor and the support from other Khitan tribal aristocrats, who traditionally considered such quality as the most important qualification for a ruler. However, this was perhaps not the only reason why the empress dowager favored him. After all, heir apparent Bei was far from being incompetent or inexperienced in the battlefields. Like his brother, Deguang, he not only fought alongside with his father in a number of remote military campaigns, leading the attack units in the front, but he was also a good strategist.¹⁰⁷

In addition to his martial quality, Bei is said to have been well versed in the Chinese classics. Conversing with the Later Tang envoy, Yao Kun, he quoted from a Chinese classic, *Zuozhuan* 左傳.¹⁰⁸ He was a great lover of books and a gifted calligrapher and painter. As early as in 916, he recommended to his father that Confucius

¹⁰⁵ See LS 2:17-20; Twitchett and Tietze, 69; F.W. Mote, 51.

¹⁰⁶ The official title of this office was *tianxia bingma da yuan shi* (天下兵馬大元帥) and was the highest in the hierarchy of the imperial armies. This post was occupied by the heir apparent or imperial princes. See LS 46:735; Wittfogel and Feng, 548; F.W. Mote, 18.

¹⁰⁷ LS 2:15-7. Also refer to his biography in LS 72:1209-1210; F.W. Mote, 51.

¹⁰⁸ JWDS 137:1831.

be revered as Khitan national sage.¹⁰⁹ When he was made the ruler of Dongdan, he adopted Chinese court attire and administrative institutions. It is possible that Bei's admiration for Chinese culture and ideas as well as eagerness in adopting Chinese institutions was not well received by his mother, who appears to have been much more attached to the Khitan cultural traditions. According to the *Liaoshi*, the empress dowager continued to be dressed in the Khitan traditional clothes even after the Chinese imperial dresses were officially adopted by Taizong during the Huitong 會同 era (938-947).¹¹⁰ Deducing from this fact, it is not too far fetched to speculate that she shared the opinion of many old tribal noblemen that a massive importation of Chinese culture would eventually corrupt the martial spirit of the Khitans and make them weak.¹¹¹

Finally, the most important reason why the empress wished to enthrone Deguang was perhaps because Deguang's wife was her niece, the daughter of her elder brother, Shilu.¹¹² It was very likely that the empress herself arranged this marriage, considering that she had previously taken an active role in marrying her own daughter, Princess Zhigu, to Shilu.¹¹³ Meanwhile, Bei's wife apparently had no relations to the family of Empress Chunqin. At least she was not a close relative of the empress. If Bei succeeded the throne, it was likely that his wife's family would intervene in the court politics. Naturally, the empress dowager wished to protect the exclusive prerogatives that she and her family had earned by preventing other families from penetrating into the inner circle of power at

¹⁰⁹ LS 72:1209.

¹¹⁰ See Wittfogel and Feng, 227-8; LS 56:908.

¹¹¹ F.W. Mote, 50-1.

¹¹² LS 71:1200.

¹¹³ LS 65:999-1000; LS 113:1505-6.

the Liao court. She must have calculated that she could continue to dominate the court with minimum resistance from her rivals if her own niece was made the new empress.

It is said that Taizong was an extremely filial and obedient son to his mother. He never made important policy decisions without consulting her first.¹¹⁴ When she got ill Taizong would refuse to eat and personally waited on her by the bedside without resting.¹¹⁵ He made her birthday a national holiday and ordered a commemorative stele honoring his mother to be erected in her ancestral land, to give a few examples of his filial behaviors.¹¹⁶ Only three years after the accession of Taizong in 930, he bestowed upon his younger brother, Lihu, the title of Grand Imperial Brother (*huangtaidi* 皇太弟). Concurrently, he was also appointed to the post of Grand Commander-in-Chief, the same post that Taizong himself had served prior to his enthronement.¹¹⁷ These facts strongly suggest that Lihu was practically designated as heir apparent even before Taizong's own son was born. This idea almost certainly came from the empress dowager as one of the preparatory measures in case Taizong died prematurely. It turned out that she was right. Taizong suddenly died on his way home in 947 from his military campaign against the Jin before reaching the Liao capital.¹¹⁸ He was only forty-five years old.

Yelü Yüan (918-51), the eldest son of the original heir apparent of Taizu, Bei, who had accompanied his uncle to the southern campaign, was immediately established as emperor by a number of imperial clansmen and generals in front of the coffin of the

¹¹⁴ XWDS 72:892; ZT 275:8993.

¹¹⁵ ZT 275:8993.

¹¹⁶ LS 3:29.

¹¹⁷ LS 3:31 and 33. See also Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 58.

¹¹⁸ LS 4:60.

deceased emperor in the military camp.¹¹⁹ The list of his supporters includes Anduan, Taizu's only surviving brother, Prince Tiande, son of Taizong by a concubine, Liuge 劉哥, Chage 察割, and Xiao Han, the nephew of Empress Dowager Chunqin.¹²⁰ Wuyü, later known as Shizong (r. 947-51), was a mature man of twenty-nine. After his father fled to China when he was twelve, he was looked after by his uncle Taizong who loved him like his own son. He earned a wide respect from the Khitan nobles with his generous personality and expertise in traditional Khitan skills such as archery and horseback riding.¹²¹ When he returned to the Liao capital, however, he met strong opposition from Empress Dowager Chunqin, who was outraged at the news of his ascension to the throne without her consent. She refused to approve of him as the legitimate successor. She dispatched her youngest son Lihu to attack the armies of Shizong, only to be defeated. Now she personally led her army and camped by the river bank across from which Shizong and his army were stationed. Tension was building up as both were awaiting each other's engagement. For a while it seemed inevitable for a civil war in a massive scale to break out which would bring the country into chaos with no end in sight. This was when Yelü Wuzhi 耶律屋質(916-72), an eloquent official indoctrinated in Confucian ideology, intervened and successfully persuaded the empress dowager to disarm and approve of Shizong. His argument had two points. First, Lihu was not equipped with the right disposition to be a good ruler for he was known to have been

¹¹⁹ Yelü Yuan's Khitan name was Wuyü 兀欲. See LS 5:63.

¹²⁰ Yelü Liuge was son of Yindishi, Taizu's third younger brother. See his biography in LS 113:1507. Yelü Chage was son of Anduan, the fourth younger brother of Taizu. See LS 112:1499.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*,

cruel and violent towards his inferiors. His second point was that Shizong was in fact the legitimate successor according to the principle of primogeniture because he was the son of the original heir apparent of Taizu.¹²² She is said to have been particularly indulgent with her youngest son, although her husband had recognized the inferiority of the qualities of Lihu to those of his older sons.¹²³ Upon hearing the argument of Yelü Wuzhi, she acknowledged that she was not blind to the flaws of Lihu and conceded. She therefore granted her approval and Shizong was formally declared as emperor.¹²⁴

The reasons why she gave up the claims of her son so easily without a fight were probably not as simple as the dynastic history narrates. The succession of Shizong does appear to have deviated from the normal procedure in a number of aspects and was inherently inclined to provoke an intense succession struggle among the different interest groups in the court.¹²⁵ First, Shizong was hurriedly proclaimed emperor by a few of his loyal supporters at a temporary military base in Zhenzhou China, away from the Liao capital. This fact suggests that the supporters had no intention of postponing the accession until they returned to the capital. It is clear that they were determined to exclude the empress from the process, fearing that she would defend the claims of her own son, Lihu. The vast majority of Shizong's supporters were imperial clansmen, as I mentioned above, whose interest was at odds with that of Empress Dowager Chunqin. It is possible that many of them were resentful of the fact that the most powerful civil and

¹²² See the biography of Yelü Wuzhi in LS 77:1255-6. See Lihu's in LS 72:1213-4.

¹²³ LS 72:1213.

¹²⁴ Only after the reconciliation between Shizong and his grandmother, he performed the investiture ceremony and adopted the new reign title. See LS 5:64.

¹²⁵ Yao Cungwu, "Qidan junwei jicheng wenti de fenxi", in *Dongbeishi luncong* Vol. 1, (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1959), 262-70.

military offices, such as Northern Prime Minister, were reserved for the members of her family.¹²⁶ The death of Taizong, therefore, presented them with a rare opportunity to change the course and undermine her power. Seeing how ruthlessly the empress dowager purged her political opponents in order to enthrone Taizong during the previous imperial succession struggle, some officials must have feared the consequences if she got her own way again this time.

Despite the faulty character of Lihu, it seems that even Shizong's supporters recognized the validity of his claims as the most qualified successor of Taizong from the perspective of the Khitan tradition of the leadership transmission. Otherwise, it is difficult to comprehend the action of Yelü Antuan, who quickly circulated in the camp a false rumor that Lihu had died, as soon as he was informed of the death of the emperor, in order to secure the loyalty of the soldiers in favor of Shizong.¹²⁷ Such a measure would not have been necessary if the Khitan generally shared the idea that Shizong was the legitimate successor as the eldest son of the original heir apparent of Taizu according to the principle of primogeniture, as Yelü Wuzhi enthusiastically advocated to Empress Dowager Chunqin. The fact that Lihu was not popular among the Khitan aristocrats and officials undoubtedly limited the empress' ability to pursue her plan any further by risking a civil war. However, the most important reason behind her decision to give up her fight must have been military. Almost all the Khitan armies were mobilized for the prolonged and large-scaled punitive campaign against the Jin, personally led by Taizong,

¹²⁶ LS 5:63-4; Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 59-51.

¹²⁷ He was a scion of the eldest paternal uncle of Taizu and should be distinguished from one of Taizu's younger brothers, Anduan. For Yelü Antuan's biography see LS 77: 1259-60.

with the exception of a few special units under the command of Lihu who was given the responsibility of guarding the Liao capital. Therefore, Shizong and his supporters who participated in the southern campaign retained the control of the majority of the Khitan army, vastly outnumbering the army of Empress Dowager Chunqin and Lihu, who were left in the capital.¹²⁸

Lastly, she failed to win the support from some of the most influential figures within her own clan, including her nephew, Xiao Han.¹²⁹ Han was the son of Xiao Dilu, the elder brother of the empress dowager, the right-hand man for Taizu in founding the Liao dynasty. Han himself was also deeply trusted by Taizong and played a crucial role in destroying the Later Jin dynasty and in governing the conquered Jin capital.¹³⁰ When the military stand-off between Shizong and Empress Dowager Chunqin occurred, Han sided with Shizong. His reasons for betraying the empress dowager were both personal and political. He harbored resentment towards the empress dowager for killing his mother, the first wife of Xiao Dilu.¹³¹ Politically, he would have gained little if Lihu was made emperor, for he was more closely connected to the households of Shizong. Han's wife, Princess Abuli 阿不里, was Shizong's sister.¹³²

¹²⁸ Yao Cungwu, "Qidan junwei jicheng", 264-266.

¹²⁹ See his biography in LS 113:1505-6.

¹³⁰ LS 4:59.

¹³¹ LS 113:1505-6. Ik-jou Choi explains that Empress Chunqin had Han's biological mother murdered so that she could marry her own daughter, Princess Zhigu, to her brother, Dilu. Although his explanation sounds logical and plausible, I have not yet found a corresponding passage in the *Liaoshi* or in any other primary sources to verify his argument. Ik-jou Choi, 84.

¹³² Han later attempted a revolt in order to replace Shizong with the second son of Taizong, Tiande, in 948. The plot was discovered before it was carried out. Han was pardoned while Tiande was executed. However, he continued to plot against the emperor by collaborating with other key members of Taizu's clan including the latter's brothers and their sons. In the following year, when his third conspiracy was reported to Shizong, Han was finally ordered to be executed. See Twitchett and Tietze, 76.

Under these circumstances, the empress dowager was in fact left with few choices but to acknowledge her grandson as the new legitimate emperor. This does not mean that Shizong and his loyal supporters at court loosened their vigilance against his grandmother and his uncle, Lihu. Shizong acted quickly upon hearing a rumor that she and Lihu were conspiring against him, using this as a pretext to expel them out of the capital. The empress dowager and Lihu were exiled to Zuzhou, where the mausoleum of Taizu was located. This marked the end of the long political career of this strong-willed, remarkably ambitious Khitan empress. She lived in isolation and confinement until she died at the age of seventy-four during the reign of the fourth Liao emperor, Muzong (r. 951-969).

Empress Ruizhi 睿智皇后 (d. 1009)

Biography

Empress Ruizhi is better known in Chinese histories as Empress Dowager Chengtian 承天皇太后, the name by which she was referred to during her regency. Ruizhi was her posthumous title bestowed upon by her grandson Emperor Xingzong 興宗 in 1052.¹³³ She was the daughter of an influential official, Xiao Siwen 蕭思溫 (d. 970).¹³⁴ He came from the illustrious branch of the consort clan that had earlier produced Xiao Dilu, half-

¹³³ LS 71:1201-2.

¹³⁴ See his biography in LS 78:1267. The *Qidan Guozhi* records that it is not entirely clear whether she was the daughter of Xiao Shouxing or Xiao Siwen. Here I follow the version of the *Liaoshi*. See QDGZ 13:3b.

brother of Empress Dowager Chunqin. He was also married to the eldest daughter of Taizong, Princess Lübugu 吕不古.¹³⁵ When Emperor Muzong 穆宗 (r. 951-969) was murdered by his personal attendants,¹³⁶ Siwen, then serving as Director of Chancellery (*shizong*, 侍中), supported the accession of Emperor Jingzong 景宗 (r. 969-982), second son of Shizong (r. 947-951).¹³⁷ Jingzong immediately rewarded Siwen's merit and loyalty by granting him double appointments to two of the highest posts in the administration, Prime Minister of Northern Division and Northern Military Commissioner.¹³⁸ Moreover, the emperor proclaimed his consort, who was Siwen's youngest daughter, empress only two months after Siwen was made Prime Minister. This was Empress Ruizhi, whose childhood name was Yan 燕.

According to her biography, Siwen noticed early that his youngest daughter was exceptionally smart and talented. He foresaw that she would bring glory to his family.¹³⁹

She bore four sons and three daughters for Jingzong. When Jingzong fell ill during a hunting trip and died prematurely at the age of thirty-four in 982, she took over the reins of the government as regent for her eleven-year old son, Lungxu, who succeeded the throne with the temple name, Shengzong 聖宗 (r. 982-1031). For the next twenty-seven years, until she died in 1009, she ruled the country as de facto ruler. Even

¹³⁵ She received a formal title of Princess of the State of Yan. LS 65:1000.

¹³⁶ Muzong is known to have had a violent temper especially when drunk. He often abused his entourage, who gradually grew resentful of him and eventually killed him, while the latter was sleeping. See Twitchett and Tizte, 84.

¹³⁷ Jinzong's Khitan name was Mingyi and was appointed as successor since his elder brother had already died. Twitchett and Tietze, 84; Ik-jou Choi, 86; LS 8:89.

¹³⁸ LS 8:89-90.

¹³⁹ It is said that one day he observed his daughters swiping the ground and noticed that Yanyan did the most thorough job of all. LS 71:1201.

after Shengzong reached adulthood, he was completely dominated by his willful mother, who openly scolded him and caned him.¹⁴⁰

When Shengzong ascended the throne, the Liao was situated in a precarious relationship with its neighbor, the Song dynasty, with whom the Liao had already experienced a hostile confrontation during the last few years of Jingzong's reign. The ambitious ruler of the Song, Taizong (r. 976-997), was constantly looking out for an opportunity to invade the north again to recover its lost territory.¹⁴¹ Besides the threat from the Song, many of the conquered tribal subjects of the Liao, including the Jurchens in the northeast, Zubu and Tangut tribes in the west, grew unruly and needed to be pacified. Empress Ruizhi, therefore, took over the government while it was going through the difficult times. She proved an exceptionally capable ruler who successfully ended the long and devastating war with the Song by securing a mutual peace agreement, better known as Shanyuan Treaty, which stipulated that the Song government would pay a large sum of annual payment to the Liao for "keeping peace". The amount of the settlement was significant and enriched the Liao revenue considerably throughout the remaining years of the Song-Liao co-existence.

¹⁴⁰ Wittfogel and Feng, 200; *Qidan Guozhi* 7:6b.

¹⁴¹ The second emperor of the Song, Zhao Guangyi (canonized as Taizong; r. 976-997) was the younger brother of the Song founder, Zhao Guangyin (Taizu; r. 960-976). Song Taizong accomplished the unification of China Proper by destroying the last two independent kingdoms of Wuyue in the south in 978 and Northern Han (951-979) in 979, thus officially ending the period of disunity since the collapse of the Tang in 907. Song Taizong was obsessed with the idea of recovering the sixteen prefectures of the Yanyun region (northern Shanxi and Hobei of present day), which was ceded to the Khitans in 938 by the Later Jin ruler, Shi Jingtang (r. 936-942) as a reward for the Khitan military help. For further details, see Jingshen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*, 25-27.

Her achievement in domestic affairs is also noteworthy. As a ruler of a multi-ethnic nation with a dual political and economic system, she endeavored to establish a fair legal and taxation system. She was eager to listening to her Chinese advisors at court to better understand the needs of her sedentary and agrarian subjects, who formed the overwhelming majority of the entire Liao population. As the authors of her biography simply put it, “Liao Shengzong is said to have been the most accomplished ruler of the entire Liao history. It is because he was well instructed by his mother.”¹⁴²

Accession of Shengzong and the Beginning of Her Regency

The *Liaoshi* claims that eleven-year old Shengzong was declared emperor in accordance with the posthumous edict left by Jingzong, which also named his widowed wife, Ruizhi, as regent.¹⁴³ Empress Ruizhi, who just turned thirty years old, however, was already well versed in the affairs of government since she had been attending the court audiences and issuing policies on behalf of her husband who had been ill during the last few years of his reign.¹⁴⁴ Upon Jingzong’s death, she is said to have expressed her fear over the potential threat from the powerful imperial agnates against her young son and her authority as a regent, as well as the unstable border situation.¹⁴⁵ Karl Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng also stated that she successfully destroyed “the coalition of paternal uncles, cousins and

¹⁴² LS 71:1202.

¹⁴³ LS 9:105.

¹⁴⁴ QDGZ 13: 130-1.

¹⁴⁵ Upon Jingzong’s death, she is said to have wept and cried, “I am widowed and my son is weak while the clan is strong and the border areas are unstable. What can be done?” See LS 71:1202.

other relatives”.¹⁴⁶ They based their ideas upon the biography of Han Derang (941-1011) in the *Qidan Guozhi*, who was by far the most powerful Chinese official during the reign of Shengzong. Han Derang is said to have provided Empress Ruizhi with many ingenious strategies to gradually undermine the power of the imperial agnates. As Jingzong’s ailment took a turn for the worse, Han urged the empress to employ various protective measures such as sending back numerous princes to their original residences, stripping them off of their military commands, and detaining their wives and children in the palace as hostages.¹⁴⁷

It is not clear how serious the threats from the imperial paternal relatives were or specifically whom the empress dowager feared most. The annals of the *Liaoshi* do not provide any records on either the preventative measures devised by Han Derang or that the empress actually put those into practice. Clearly neither *Qidan guozhi* nor the *Liaoshi* provide specific information on the identity of the potentially dangerous imperial clansmen to interfere with the imperial succession to Shengzong. Therefore, I am inclined to agree with Jennifer Holmgren that *Qidan Guozhi* probably exaggerated the political tension between the empress dowager and the imperial agnates at the court in order to present a version of the event in which the Chinese officials, including Han Derang, played an extremely important role in the process of Shezong’s accession.¹⁴⁸ The internal political situation of the Liao at the time might have been more stable than the sources claim.

¹⁴⁶ Wittfogel and Feng, 403.

¹⁴⁷ QDGZ 18:2a; Jennifer Holmgren, “Marriage, Kinship”, 79.

¹⁴⁸ Jennifer Holmgren, “Marriage, Kinship”, 79-80. See his biography in LS 82:1290: QDGZ 7: 64-5.

As the eldest son of the previous emperor, the legitimacy of Shengzong's claim was not contested, although he was never formally proclaimed as heir apparent during his father's reign.¹⁴⁹ Certainly, by the time Shengzong, the sixth ruler of the Liao, began his reign, the idea of lineal transmission of the leadership based upon the principle of primogeniture was more or less accepted by the Khitan aristocrats. Moreover, the fact that there were no other possible candidates left among the descendants of Abaoji, who would have challenged the young emperor, certainly worked to the advantage of Shengzong and his mother's ambitions. Shortly after Jingzong ascended the throne, Taizong's last surviving son, Yansage, was suspected of participating in a conspiracy a few years earlier, died without heirs.¹⁵⁰

It was also during the reign of Jingzong that the line of Lihu, Taizu's third son, was terminated when Lihu's son and grandson, Xiyin and Liulishou, respectively, were killed for attempting to usurp the throne in 981.¹⁵¹ This was the only revolt staged by imperial kinsmen during the reign and quickly suppressed.¹⁵² Although Lihu himself lived quietly in exile without being engaged in any conspiratorial activities until his death

¹⁴⁹ Jennifer Holmgren pointed out the fact that only two Liao emperors formally appointed heir apparent during their reign. The first was Taizu, who made his first son, Bei, his successor in 916 and the other was Shengzong. He proclaimed his first son from his consort Chinai in 1021. See "Marriage, Kinship", 80-82.

¹⁵⁰ Yansage was Taizong's second son and the younger brother of the fourth emperor, Muzong. He was involved with the conspiracy against Muzong led by Lihu's first son, Wan, in 953. In 969, when his illicit communication was disclosed to Jingzong, he fled to the western frontier, but soon he was summoned back to the capital by the emperor, who pardoned him. Yansage is also known to have been married to the militant elder sister of Empress Ruizhi, Hulian. He died in 972. LS 64:979; LS 8:90.

¹⁵¹ LS 8:92; LS 9:104. In 981, a unit of Chinese soldiers stationed in Upper Capital staged a military coup and declared Xiyin's son, Liulishou emperor. Both Xiyin and Liulishou were captured and the former was forced to commit suicide while the latter was executed. Wittfogel and Feng, 418; LS 72:1214.

¹⁵² LS 9:104.

in 960, his sons, particularly, Wan and Xiyin, repeatedly rebelled against Muzong and Jingzong.¹⁵³ It seems that the heirs of Lihu's line were firmly convinced that they too shared the prerogatives to the imperial throne. This was largely due to the fact that the Khitan pattern of imperial succession up to the fifth reign did not adhere to the principle of primogeniture in the strict sense. The two lines descended from the first two sons of Taizu, Bei, the original heir apparent, and the second son, Deguang (Taizong), took a turn in producing the subsequent emperors, until Jingzong, a grandson of Bei, was made emperor in 969. From then on, the imperial succession remained in the senior line until the end of the dynasty.¹⁵⁴ Although Lihu never ruled, the title of Grand Imperial Brother was conferred upon him by his brother Taizong as well as a posthumous title of emperor.¹⁵⁵ In a way, this gave an appearance that all the three lines descending from Taizu were equally qualified to produce the imperial successors. Such ambiguousness in the early Khitan inheritance system was the source of constant dissatisfaction among the imperial brothers and repeatedly erupted in the forms of conspiracy and revolt during the first four reigns in the Liao history.¹⁵⁶

Starting from the reign of Jingzong, however, the Liao dynasty finally began to enjoy internal stability relatively free from challenges from the imperial agnates.¹⁵⁷

However, I do not intend to dismiss entirely the possibility that Empress Ruizhi was

¹⁵³ Lihu's two sons, Wan and Xiyin, attempted a revolt on two separate occasions in 953 and in 960. Karl Wittfogel explains in a chronological order all the rebellions attempted by the imperial agnates throughout the Liao history. See Wittfogel and Feng, 401-4.

¹⁵⁴ Refer to the figure of the Liao imperial succession in Wittfogel and Feng, 401.

¹⁵⁵ LS 64:975.

¹⁵⁶ Taizong's second son, Tiande, and Shizong's younger brother, Luoguo, conspired against Shizong and Muzong, respectively. Wittfogel and Feng, 402.

¹⁵⁷ Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 78.

concerned about her young son's future, as stated in the sources. After all, Shengzong was the first Khitan emperor who ascended the throne well before reaching adulthood and as his regent, she saw the need to further enhance the imperial authority and curb the power of the Khitan aristocrats. She implemented a series of administrative measures in order to bring the semi-independent tribal officials and noblemen under the direct control of the central government.

Domestic Policies

During Shengzong's reign, there was a great change in tribal administration. First, eighteen tribes originally established by Taizu were reorganized into thirty four. Tribal titles of the chieftains of some of the old and powerful tribes were converted to administrative alternatives, indicating that they were now subject to the direct supervision of the central government. Many tribes were reassigned to corresponding local administrative units.¹⁵⁸ For instance, all tribal leaders who had been formerly referred to with the Khitan tribal title, *lingwen* 令穩, were renamed as Commanding Prefect (*jiedushi* 節度使).¹⁵⁹ However, such a measure was not an invention of Empress Ruizhi or of her capable ministers but a reintroduction of one of Taizu's early strategies.

Non-Khitan subordinate tribes also lost their semi-autonomous status and became more fully incorporated into the Khitan administrative system. In 983, Shengzong

¹⁵⁸ For the list of the names of Shengzong's thirty four tribes and other details on the internal changes, see LS 33:388-393; Wittfogel and Feng, 89-92.

¹⁵⁹ LS 13:148.

declined to approve of a tribe's request to select their own officials.¹⁶⁰ The Xi tribes, many of who had resented the Khitan occupation and frequently revolted, also became more thoroughly assimilated during the reign of Shengzong.¹⁶¹ During the last decade of the tenth century, the Xi rulers gradually gave up their nominal independent status in exchange for the Liao administrative offices. This was largely due to the new policy that liberated many of the Xi tribesmen from their bondsmen status and allowed them to live separately on their own in their original homeland centered in the Central Capital.¹⁶² The large portion of the expense in constructing the walled city was covered by the hefty payment received from the Song government as a part of the peace treaty concluded in 1004. Peaceful incorporation of the Xi population was of a particular significance to the Liao government at the time for it was striving to promote the idea of tribal unity, which was necessary in the times of war. The Liao was at war with its neighbors, the Song and Koryŏ.¹⁶³

Frequent military campaigns also required the central government to update the population census in order to maximize the revenue by preventing people from evading their taxes of various kinds including corvée labor. The Liao taxation system, modeled after the Tang, was first implemented during the early years of Taizu's reign by his

¹⁶⁰ LS 10:113; Wittfogel and Feng, 99 and 419.

¹⁶¹ For the Khitan policies on the Xi tribe and the development of their relationship, see Li Han and Shen Xueming, "Luelun Xizu zai Liaodaide fadian", in *Song Liao Jin shi luncong*, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 277-294.

¹⁶² Twitchett and Tietze, 97-8; Wittfogel and Feng, 89; LS 33:388.

¹⁶³ Twitchett and Tietze, 98. For the Liao-Koryŏ relations, see Kim Weehyun (Jin Weixian), *Qidande Dongbei zhengce: Qidan yu Gaoli Nüzhen guanxi zhi yanjiu*, (Taipei: Huashi chubanshe, 1981).

Chinese advisor, Han Yanhui, who had also organized the first census.¹⁶⁴ But the taxes targeted the sedentary population in the Southern Capital area. Empress Dowager Ruizhi ordered a land survey and a general population census in 991, which encompassed the tribal sector for the first time. Again in 997, a survey of the tribal households attached to the *ordos* was ordered.¹⁶⁵

Throughout her regency, particularly in the 990s, a number of tax-related decrees were issued to improve efficiency and accuracy in collecting various taxes. However, she was not a heartless ruler who was only interested in increasing the size of the revenue by levying the heaviest tax possible. She was rather a thoughtful one who tried to understand the needs of the sedentary population in the Southern Capital Circuit that were bearing the responsibility of generating almost the entire Liao revenue. Hoping to alleviate the burden of the masses and avoid unnecessary exploitation, she ordered an equitable taxation law to be established in 994.¹⁶⁶ In 986, an investigator was dispatched from the central government to look into an alleged illegal tax collecting activities in a few local regions. On a number of occasions, she exempted or reduced the taxes and duties on famine-struck regions.¹⁶⁷ She frequently encouraged agriculture and projects to develop the wastelands by offering various incentives for the farmers. Military and tribal

¹⁶⁴ LS 74:1231-2.

¹⁶⁵ Wittfogel and Feng, 113; Twitchett and Tietze, 95-6; LS 13:141 and 149.

¹⁶⁶ It is not clearly understood what “equitable tax law (*junshuifa* 均稅法)” means in *Liaoshi*. Whether its purpose was to obtain equalization of the taxes levied on different classes of population or to make the taxes more equitable for the common people, eventually the attempt was a failure, since under the following emperor Xingzong, this issue was brought up again in 1056. Finally when the Jin conquered the Liao, a decree was issued to equalize the Liao taxes for they “were levied unequally”. See Wittfogel and Feng, 339 no. 42 and 343; Twitchett and Tietze, 96; LS 13:145.

¹⁶⁷ Wittfogel and Feng, 338-9.

hunting activities were restricted to the non-agrarian fields and allowed only in accordance with the agricultural calendar to avoid damaging the crops.¹⁶⁸ She also abolished the practice of making the common people pay for the wages of the government officials. Instead, they were to be paid directly from the state treasury.¹⁶⁹ By putting the officials on the direct payroll of the government, not only could she prevent some greedy local officials from abusing their subjects but also could enhance the authority of the emperor and the central government.

In tandem with other efforts to centralize the power, during the first decade of Empress Dowager Ruizhi's regency, a series of edicts were issued to facilitate communication between the central government and the remote local regions. New roads and bridges were ordered to be built and new courier posts were erected on four separate occasions from 985 to 989. Improved roads not only served the purpose of faster transmission of the imperial orders and tighter control of the local administrations but also contributed greatly to the effective mobilization of the troops in times of war.¹⁷⁰

The scope of Empress Dowager Ruizhi's achievements extended to the realm of the legal system. It is said that she had had a deep interest in hearing and ruling on the legal suits from the beginning of her regency and often urged the emperor to promote more lenient laws.¹⁷¹ Since the beginning of the dynasty, the Liao followed the principle

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 138-9.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 341; LS 14:153.

¹⁷⁰ Wittfogel and Feng, 164-5. In 984, Shi Fang 室昉 (920-994), one of Empress Ruizhi's most trusted Chinese prime ministers, was in charge of enacting the imperial order to build mountain roads and accomplished the task in one day. LS 79:1271; LS 10:115; LS 12:131; LS 12:134.

¹⁷¹ LS 61:939. Also refer to Herbert Franke's translated version of *Xingfazhi* 刑法志, "The 'Treaties on Punishments' in the Liao History", *Central Asiatic Journal* 27 (1983):9-38.

of the dual legal system in a similar pattern of their dual administrative structure to govern two different populations, tribal and sedentary. In other words, if a Khitan tribesman committed a crime, he was to be punished by the Khitan customary law and a Chinese or other sedentary subject by the Tang Code.¹⁷² However, a dispute between a Khitan, member of the ruling class, and a conquered subject, mainly Chinese or Bohai, was invariably ruled in favor of the Khitan, as one can easily imagine. For example, if a Khitan assaulted and killed a Chinese, his crime could be redeemed by making a suitable payment to the victim's family. In a reversed situation, the Chinese would receive capital punishment and his extended family would be degraded to the status of slaves and confiscated by the state.¹⁷³

In 983 she ordered a new code drafted by the administration of the Southern Capital to be translated into the Khitan language so that it could be used as a reference for the Northern Government.¹⁷⁴ It was decreed in 994 that any Khitan who had committed one of Ten Abominable Crimes, cited in the Tang Code, were now to be punished according to the Chinese law.¹⁷⁵ This was the first formal declaration of legal equalization in the Liao dynasty, although it was considerably restricted. The severity of

¹⁷² Japanese scholars accomplished the most thorough and comprehensive research on the Liao law and institutions. See Shimada Masao and Takigawa Masjirō, *Ryōritsu no kenkyū* [A Study on the Liao Law], (Tokyo: Osaka yagō shoten, 1943); Shimada Masao, *Ryōsei no kenkyū* [A Study on the Liao Institutions], (Tokyo: Nakazawa insatsu kabushiki kaisha, 1954, Repr., 1973).

¹⁷³ *Xū Zizhitongjian changpian (XZTC)* 72:1646. An actual case cited in *Liaoshi* gives us a good example of the partiality of the Liao law. In 988, a Xi prince, Chouning 籌寧, killed an innocent Chinese man but was pardoned in consideration of his noble status. He was ordered to offer financial compensation for the victim's family. Wittfogel and Feng, 231; LS 12:130.

¹⁷⁴ LS 10:110; Twitchett and Tietze, 94.

¹⁷⁵ Wittfogel and Feng, 231 no. 30; Twitchett and Tietze, 94; LS 61:939. For the detailed definitions of Ten Abominable Crimes (*shi e* 十惡), refer to *The T'ang Code: volume I, General Principles*, translated by Wallace Johnson, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 17-8 and 61-83.

punishments in the old law was also mitigated considerably. Public display of the corpse of a prisoner in the market place for three days was mandatory in the old law, for instance, but the new law allowed the family of the deceased criminal to collect the body and offer burial after one day.¹⁷⁶

It is perhaps natural that Shengzong developed a keen interest in the matters of law as well. Shengzong continued to strive to achieve unification of the law after he took over the reins of the government in 1009 upon the death of his mother. During the first two decades of the eleventh century, a number of decrees were issued to restrain some legal privileges of the aristocrats and to make them subject of the same penalties as the commoners prescribed by the law.¹⁷⁷ More efforts were made in mitigating harsh penalties and reforming the judicial procedures.¹⁷⁸ In 1027, he ordered a revised version of the Chinese code to be compiled.¹⁷⁹ Despite such efforts, however, the legal equality in the Liao dynasty was never fully realized. In less than two decades, a legal principle favoring the Khitans over the Chinese and other nationalities was readopted by Xingzong under the pressure from the Khitan aristocrats who perceived the application of the unified law as the encroachment of the privileges of the ruling class and resented it.¹⁸⁰

The legal reforms initiated during the reign of Shengzong under the regency of Empress

¹⁷⁶ LS 61:939.

¹⁷⁷ In 1006, killing of one's own slaves who had committed a crime was forbidden. The owner of such slaves was instructed to hand them over to the authorities. In 1011, the old law that granted an exemption for the families of high officials from receiving the punishment of tattooing was abolished and they were to be treated the same as other people henceforth. See Wittfogel and Feng, 232; LS 61:939.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*; Herbert Franke, "Treaties on Punishment", 22-3.

¹⁷⁹ Twitchett and Tietze, 94; LS 17:201.

¹⁸⁰ See Wittfogel and Feng, 198-9 and 234; LS 112:1501-2. In 1044 Xingzong's younger brother, Zhongyuan, memorialized to the throne that a Khitan Criminal Investigator should be established in each capital to oversee the criminal cases involving the Khitan nationals. This was approved.

Dowager Ruizhi failed to eliminate the inequality deeply rooted in the Liao society. Nevertheless, her endeavor to end arbitrary and inconsistent legal practices by adopting a universal and systematic code of laws should be highly regarded. She deeply understood the importance of applicable universal laws as the most fundamental tool in governing a complex, multi-ethnic state such as the Liao. Although the penalties prescribed in the Liao law were in general a little more severe than those in the Tang or in the Song law. From a certain perspective, the Liao laws were considerably progressive.¹⁸¹ This is best illustrated when the empress dowager gladly adopted the radical idea of Yelü Amoli 耶律阿沒里, one of her favorite officials, who had remonstrated with her about the injustice of the principle of the collective prosecution (*lianzuo* 連坐). He contended that an innocent man should not be punished for treason committed by his brother, especially when he was not even aware of the fact. Upon hearing this, Empress Dowager Ruizhi ordered the ordinance to be drawn to abolish the law.¹⁸²

Her Loyal Ministers during the period of Regency

Over all, the various administrative changes and legal reforms discussed above were targeted at centralizing the power at the hands of the emperor by cutting back the privileges of the powerful imperial kinsmen and aristocrats. Many of the measures, particularly those on the tax exemptions and the famine relief, were in fact adopted from the suggestions made by the two Chinese ministers, Shi Fang 室昉 (920-94) and Han

¹⁸¹ The harshness of the Liao law is discussed by Herbert Franke, "Treaties of Punishment", 9-38.

¹⁸² LS 79:1274-5; Wittfogel and Feng, 231 no. 31.

Derang 韓德讓 (941-1011), who assisted the empress dowager in governing the state throughout her regency.

Shi Fang was the senior of the two and had served the various posts at his native region of the Southern Capital Circuit under four different emperors since 947.¹⁸³ Due to his good reputation as a great scholar with integrity, he was regarded very highly by Jingzong, who eventually promoted him to the key offices of Military Commissioner and Northern Prime Minister in 979. After Shengzong ascended the throne, Shi Fang repeatedly requested to retire but his requests were declined by the empress dowager who continued to shower him with additional offices and honorary titles. In addition to bringing to her attention to the heavy tax burden born by the Chinese farmers, he is responsible for directing the compilation of the first official records of the Liao court, which were presented to the emperor in 991. Shortly before he died, he personally designated Han Derang as his successor.¹⁸⁴

Han Derang was a scion of a well-established Chinese family that produced prominent civil officials since the reign of Taizu. His grandfather, Zhigu, was greatly favored by Taizu and his wife, Empress Chunqin, and became the first Chinese ever to have received an important office in the Liao government.¹⁸⁵ Zhigu's son, Guangsi 匡嗣 (d. 981), led an even more successful career than his father had, particularly during the reign of Jingzong. He served various key posts including Military Commissioner.

¹⁸³ See his official biography in LS 79:1271-2. He entered the officialdom after being awarded the first *jinshi* degree in the Liao history during the reign of Taizong.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, See also Twitchett and Tietze, 88; Wittfogel and Feng, 499.

¹⁸⁵ LS 74:1233.

Although he committed a serious crime of abandoning his troops and fleeing the battlefield during the war against the Song in 979, he was generously forgiven thanks to the intervention of Empress Ruizhi.¹⁸⁶ Entering the service through “protection” prerogative, all five of his sons were also active in the Liao government.¹⁸⁷ The career of his second eldest, Derang, was the most brilliant, for he became the most powerful figure in the empire next to the emperor and his empress-dowager regent.

Han Derang began his official career under Jingzong as viceroy of the Upper and Southern Capital, the posts he had inherited from his father. Shortly thereafter, his successful defense of the capital against invading Song army in 979 brought him a series of prestigious appointments. Before his death, Jingzong is said to have entrusted Han Derang and Yelü Xiezhen, a powerful Khitan aristocrat, to oversee the safe transmission of the throne to Shengzong.¹⁸⁸ He was deeply trusted and respected by Empress Dowager Ruizhi. After the hostility with the Song was resumed in 986, he often accompanied the empress to the battlefields and proved himself a competent commander. During the final phase of the Song war from 994 to 1004, he was appointed to two most powerful posts in the Liao official hierarchy, Northern Prime Minister and Military Commissioner of Northern Division, concurrently. He was the only Chinese official in the entire Liao history who held these two offices concurrently.¹⁸⁹

When the imperial surname, Yelü, was bestowed upon him, his lineage was ordered to be incorporated into the Horizontal Tent of the imperial clan in 1004. His

¹⁸⁶ Twitchett and Tietze, 89; LS 74:1234.

¹⁸⁷ LS 74:1234-5; LS 82:1291.

¹⁸⁸ LS 82:1289-1291.

¹⁸⁹ Wittfogel and Feng, 464.

family members were even granted the privilege of intermarrying with the Xiao clan. When he died in 1011 at the age of seventy-one, he was allowed to be buried beside the mausoleum of Jingzong and Empress Ruizhi. He was also the only non-imperial figure permitted to establish an *ordo*-like military camp, although posthumously.¹⁹⁰ His extraordinary success also offered many of his relatives opportunities to join the Liao administration where they continued to occupy influential offices for another century. The Han family remained the most prosperous and powerful Chinese family until the end of the dynasty.¹⁹¹

It is generally considered that the Khitan Sinicization process reached its peak during the regency of Empress Dowager Ruizhi. The gradual bureaucratization of the Liao government, the adoption of the Chinese legal system, reinstatement of the *jinshi* examination and the establishment of a historiographical office are often enumerated as the hallmarks of the Khitan Sinicization. The real situation, however, was more complex and cannot be explained simply by the empress' aspiration for the Chinese institutions and culture. As we can see from the careers of the two Chinese ministers, many Chinese officials active during her regency were initially admitted into key offices by her late husband, Jingzong, when the conflicts with the Song broke out in 970s.¹⁹² Shortly after she began her regency, the military conflict with the Song was resumed in 986, only to last for almost two decades. She continued to employ the Chinese officials in order to

¹⁹⁰ Wittfogel and Feng, 259, 228, 230; LS 31:370.

¹⁹¹ Wittfogel and Feng, 461. For more information on the history of the Han family, refer to the recent study by Li Xihou, "Shilun Liaodai Yudian Hanshi jiazou de lishi diwei", in *Song Liao Jin shi luncong*, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 251-266.

¹⁹² Wittfogel and Feng, 451.

come up with effective strategies to defeat the Song. Like Empress Chunqin, Empress Ruizhi, excelled at utilizing her subjects, whether they were Chinese or Khitan, according to their talents and skills, particularly in the times of emergency. During the last phase of the war in 1003, Wang Jizhong 王繼忠, a renowned Song general, was captured during the battle.¹⁹³ Empress Dowager Ruizhi was impressed with him and generously conferred upon him an office and a woman to marry. He worked hard to gain her confidence and was eager to seize an opportunity to prove his loyalty to his Khitan lord. In 1004, he was given a grave task of negotiating peace with the Song on behalf of the empress dowager.¹⁹⁴ That Wang had had a special relationship with his counterpart in the Song government, Bi Shian (938-1005), as well as with the new Song emperor, Zhenzong 眞宗 (r. 997-1022), was probably one of the major reasons why he was chosen as the Liao negotiator.¹⁹⁵ At the time, the Liao army successfully penetrated deep into the Song territory by overwhelming the Song defenses, however, the empress was aware that their prolonged stay in the hostile region would eventually be disadvantageous to them. Therefore, she was eager to negotiate for peace. On the Song side, the young emperor, Zhenzong, timid and passive by nature and never comfortable with his role as wartime commander-in-chief in the first place, would have passionately embraced any opportunity to put an end to the war, even at a high cost.¹⁹⁶ Wang Jizhong's successful negotiation yielded a mutually agreeable peace treaty which stipulated the large sum of

¹⁹³ See his biography in LS 81:1284; *Song Shi* 279:9471-2.

¹⁹⁴ Jing-shen Tao, *Two sons of Heaven*, 14-6.

¹⁹⁵ Twitchett and Tietze, 107-8.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, For details of the negotiation process, see Jing-shen Tao, 14-19.

annual payment by silver and silk from the Song government to the Liao.¹⁹⁷ After the successful conclusion of the treaty, Wang continued to receive favorable attention from Shengzong who eventually promoted him to the post of Military Commissioner and conferred upon him the honorific imperial surname.¹⁹⁸

As we can see above, the Song war facilitated the appointments of the Chinese officials to the key military offices that were normally reserved for the Khitan aristocrats. However, once the war was over and the Liao regained its normalcy and stability, such posts were again dominated by the Khitan aristocrats from the two ruling clans.¹⁹⁹ Even Han Derang was not given the supreme command of the Khitan army until the influential Khitan nobles, such as Northern Military Commissioner, Yelü Xiezhen and Yelü Xiuge, the long-serving commander-in-chief, suddenly died in the middle of the campaign in 998 and 999, respectively.²⁰⁰ Chinese sources such as *Qidan Guozhi* seem to have exaggerated the roles played by Han Derang and other Chinese officials during the early years of Shengzong's reign. It is even asserted, with little grounds, that Han Derang owed his prosperous career to his illicit relationship with the empress dowager.²⁰¹ Such assertions notwithstanding, there is little doubt that Yelü Xiuzhen and Yelü Xiuge were more dominating figures in the cabinet of Shengzong during the first half of his reign. Both were trusted by the previous emperor, Jingzong, for their martial qualities. Xiezhen began his official career through the recommendation of Xiao Siwen, Empress

¹⁹⁷ For the details of Treaty of Shanyuan, see Jing-shen Tao, 15-20.

¹⁹⁸ LS 81:1284-5.

¹⁹⁹ Wittfogel and Feng, 464.

²⁰⁰ Twitchett and Tietze, 105; LS 14:154. For the biography of Yelü Xiezhen and Yelü Xiuge, see LS 83:1302-3; LS 83:1299-1301.

²⁰¹ QDGZ 13:130-2.

Ruizhi's father. Xiezhen even received an honor of marrying one of Empress Ruizhi's nieces. Upon Shengzong's accession, the empress dowager arranged a unique ceremony, in which Yelü Xiezhen and the young emperor were instructed to exchange their saddles, horses, arrows and bows, as they swore their friendship.²⁰² This incident reflects how thoroughly Xiezhen was trusted by the empress as imperial protector and guardian. He not only played a leading role in the campaigns against the Song but also in subjugating the revolts of the Jurchen tribes.

Yelü Xiuge was an extremely gifted warrior just like his grandfather, Shulan, Taizu's uncle, who had served as commander in chief of the tribal confederation. Xiuge caught the attention of Jingzong when he brilliantly routed the invading Song armies and defended the Southern Capital under siege in 979. He continued to render his service to Empress Dowager Ruizhi as an excellent strategist and commander when the Song war resumed. He was appointed by Empress Dowager Ruizhi to the post of Commander in Chief in 984 and served until he died in 998. Naturally, he participated in all the major military campaigns of the Liao and he often led the front attack unit personally, as he did during the Song war and the campaign against Koryŏ.²⁰³

Empress Dowager Ruizhi continued to enforce the earlier policy, originally devised by Taizu, of trusting and promoting only the imperial kinsmen, who were distantly related to the emperor, as we can see from the cases of Yelü Xiezhen and Xiuge. She also favored bestowing loyal Chinese officials or non-Khitans with

²⁰² Twitchett and Tietze, 90; Wittfogel and Feng, 258; LS 10:111.

²⁰³ LS 83:1299-1301.

honorific membership to the imperial clan.²⁰⁴ This generated an effect of introducing new blood into the narrow and exclusive aristocratic circle that had dominated political power. It proved to be beneficial to the emperor to promote imperial clansmen from less distinguished branches, the Khitan tribesmen of humble origins as well as non-Khitan subjects including Chinese. They tended to make more devoted subjects for they owed their position solely to the imperial favor.²⁰⁵

Overall, Empress Ruizhi reused the time-honored strategies introduced by the first Liao empress, Empress Chunqin, in order to maintain her absolute authority at the court and secure powerful posts for the members of her natal family. In 986, she appointed her brother, Xiao Jixian 蕭繼先 (d. 1010), to the post of the Northern Prime Minister. He had hereditary claims for the office since his father, Xiao Siwen, had received the privilege from Jingzong.²⁰⁶ Just as Empress Chunqin had done, she arranged the marriage between her brother and her eldest daughter, Princess Guanyinnü 觀音女.²⁰⁷ In 1001, Empress Dowager Ruizhi announced her own niece, daughter of her younger brother, as empress of Shengzong.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Refer again to the careers of Han Derang and Wang Jizhong for examples. Yelü Amoli who recommended to the empress the abolition of collective punishment had come from the Yaolian clan, the old ruling family in the pre-dynastic era. See above for details. See also Jennifer Holmgren, 71 no. 123.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 70-1.

²⁰⁶ Jixian was actually an adopted son of Xiao Siwen. According to his biography, his uncle Siwen was impressed by the young and intelligent Jixian and adopted him subsequently. See his biography in LS 78:1268.

²⁰⁷ Wittfogel and Feng, 208; LS 65:1001. Guanyinnü was the favorite daughter of Empress Ruizhi who endowed her with a large number of slave households and an entrusted prefecture.

²⁰⁸ See the biography of Shengzong's empress Rende 仁德 in LS 71:1202; LS 14:156.

Although she was reluctant to admit close imperial agnates to the powerful military posts, she made an exception for her own sons. All of her three sons, including Shengzong, frequently accompanied her to the important military campaigns abroad. Her second son, Longqing 隆慶(d. 1016), was a brilliant commander in the battles against the Song and was particularly favored by the empress dowager.²⁰⁹ Both Longqing and Longyou 隆佑, the youngest son of the empress, were granted with a series of appointments to the key military offices throughout their lives.²¹⁰ Of the two, Longqing enjoyed a far more prosperous a career and commanded exceptional authority at the court. While he was vicegerent of the Southern Capital, it is said that he lived in such splendor and luxury that was almost equal to the lifestyle of Shengzong himself.²¹¹ It is not clear whether she intended to establish Longqing as imperial successor in case Shengzong would meet a premature death, in the same manner that Empress Chunqin had prepared her third son, Lihu, to succeed Taizong. Whatever her plans were regarding the imperial succession, Longqing was never officially declared heir apparent during her regency.²¹² Even after she died in 1009, he continued his prosperous career at the court, the peak of which was his appointment to Commander-in-Chief in 1011. His unusual status is well illustrated in the fact that he was permitted to establish his own *ordo* camp which was constituted with

²⁰⁹ LS 64:986-7.

²¹⁰ The list of the offices that Longqing and Longyou had served is given in LS 64:987-8. Longyou also participated in the campaigns against Koryŏ.

²¹¹ Wittfogel and Feng, 415, no. 50.

²¹² *Ibid.*,. Although he never actually ruled, Longqing was given a posthumous title of emperor in *Qidan Guozhi*. QDGZ 14:2A.

eight thousand households.²¹³ Establishing a personal *ordo* was reserved as an exclusive prerogative of the emperors throughout the Liao dynasty.²¹⁴ He was the only imperial brother who ever received such privilege. However, unlike Lihu, Longqing never attempted to challenge his elder brother and remained a loyal subject until his death. In 1017 he was posthumously bestowed with the honorific title of Grand Imperial Brother (*huangtaidi* 皇太弟).²¹⁵

Summary

As we follow Empress Ruizhi's life and the careers of the influential officials in her cabinet, we cannot help but to notice that there are striking parallels between her political strategies and those of Empress Chunqin. Because Empress Ruizhi came to power as regent to an immature young emperor in a manner that is considered typically Chinese, it is suggested that the Liao imperial succession had finally assimilated the Chinese principle of primogeniture and that the Khitan gave up their tribal tradition of acknowledging the fraternal and collateral claims.²¹⁶ Because many Chinese-style institutions and administrative policies were implemented during her regency, it has often been suggested that the rapid process of Sinification of the Liao society took place during the reign of Shengzong.

²¹³ Wittfogel and Feng, 541, 546-7; LS 35:370; LS 35:405.

²¹⁴ Out of total thirteen *ordos*, nine were established by the emperors and two by Empress Chunqin and Empress Ruizhi, respectively. Out of the remaining two *Ordos*, one belonged to Longqing and the other was bestowed to Han Derang posthumously. See Wittfogel and Feng, 540-1; LS 35:402.

²¹⁵ Wittfogel and Feng, 403; Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 71; LS 64:986.

²¹⁶ Wittfogel and Feng, 400-4; Ik-jou Choi, 74-80.

Notwithstanding the Chinese administrative measures, often initiated by her favorite Chinese officials, Empress Ruizhi remained a traditional Khitan matriarch in many aspects. She had the martial quality which was reminiscent of Empress Chunqin. She maintained her own *ordo*, named Chongde Palace 崇德宮, which was able to sustain a cavalry unit of ten thousand soldiers in case of emergency.²¹⁷ She often led the foreign military campaigns personally, including the final phase of the Song war. Throughout her regency, she remained the center of the political power. Her ministers, advisors and military commanders, irregardless of their ethnic origins, were also aware that she was in charge, whether they owed their powerful positions to their family prerogatives or to their faithful service and loyalty to the empress. We have observed above that both her father and her adopted brother served in the offices of Northern Military Commissioner and Chancellor of Northern Division. Throughout the imperial history in China, the members of the imperial consort clans enjoyed great prestige and often dominated politics. It was by no means a unique phenomenon that was confined to her reign or even to the Liao dynasty. What is so extraordinary about the reign of Empress Ruizhi is that her power extended not only to the male members of her family but also to female members who also played a conspicuous role in the Liao military and politics. Her eldest sister, Hulian 輦(d. 1007), headed a series of punitive military expeditions against the rebellious Zubu 阻 卜 tribes in the northwestern border regions from 994 to 1004.²¹⁸ Commanding thirty thousand soldiers, she successfully pacified the rebellion and is said to have constructed

²¹⁷ Her *ordo* was established after her husband passed away. Wittfogel and Feng, 544-5; LS 35:404.

²¹⁸ LS 13:145 and 149; QDGZ 13:3b-4a; Wittfogel and Feng, 557, no. 120.

the city of Kedun 可敦 on the Orkhon River (in Outer Mongolia) in 1004. In 1006, she was arrested for the charges of conspiring against Empress Dowager Ruizhi and died in the following year in imprisonment.²¹⁹ It is interesting to note that her second elder sister was also accused of attempting to poison her. As a consequence, the empress had her stripped of the privilege and rank and demoted her to the status of a slave.²²⁰

Empress Ruizhi's daughters were also endowed with generous gifts from their mother and enjoyed great prestige. We have already discussed above that the eldest daughter, Guanyinnü, was married to the adopted brother of the empress dowager, Xiao Jixian. Because the empress was very indulgent of this princess, she granted her a large number of slave households, with whom the latter could establish her own prefecture.²²¹ The fact that whoever was related to her or favored by her, all enjoyed great privileges simply reflects how absolute her power and authority was. That she granted both of her younger sons with powerful military positions may seem contrary to her general policy of restricting political participation of the imperial clansmen closely related to the emperor. However, all of the three Liao empress dowagers shared the same tendency of empowering their own sons while they were wary of delegating power to other imperial agnates. We have seen it in the case of Empress Chunqin earlier and will see it repeated

²¹⁹ Her marriage to Prince Yansage (d. 970), son of Taizong, and her affair with a foreign slave have been discussed above in the section of Patterns of the Liao Imperial Marriage. The details of the charges related to her alleged conspiracy are not given in the sources. LS 14:162-3; QDGZ 13:3b-4a.

²²⁰ QDGZ 13:3b-4a.

²²¹ She was granted with ten thousand slave households. Her entrusted prefecture (*touxiashou* 頭下州) was named Hui 徽州 and all the officials below the rank of *jiedushi* were appointed directly by the princess. Wittfogel and Feng, 230, no. 26; LS 37:448.

by Empress Qinai 欽哀皇后, mother of the seventh emperor Xingzong 興宗 (r. 1031-1055).

Empress Qinai 欽哀皇后 (d. 1058)

Having ruled the Liao for almost fifty years, Shengzong died in the summer of 1031 at the age of sixty. His reign was the longest in the Liao history. Only his grandson, Daozong 道宗 (r. 1055-1101), ruled almost as long as Shengzong. Upon his death, his eldest son, Zongzhen 宗眞 (Khitan name Yibujin 夷不董), who had been officially appointed as heir apparent in 1021, was immediately enthroned in front of his coffin.²²² The new emperor, who was later canonized as Xingzong (r. 1031-55), was only fifteen years old. The fact that he was born to a lesser consort titled Primary Consort Shunsheng (Shunsheng Yüanfei 順聖元妃) but raised by Shengzong's principal wife, Empress Rende 仁德皇后 complicated the issue of establishing a regent for him. Empress Rende was niece of the late Empress Dowager Ruizhi, who had chosen the former as empress to her son in 1001.²²³ Rende remained childless after her two sons died in infancy. When Consort Shunsheng bore the future Xingzong in 1016, Empress Rende took him in and raised him as if he were her own son.²²⁴

²²² LS 18:211; LS 16:189.

²²³ For her biography, see LS 71:1202-3. Rende is her posthumous honorary title. She was referred to as Empress Qitian during her lifetime. According to *Liaoshi*, her father was a younger brother of Empress Ruizhi. However, this is inconsistent with the accounts in a different chapter which states that Chancellor, Xiao Siwen (Empress Ruizhi's father), was heirless thus an adopted son, Jixian, was established as an heir. See also LS 67:1028.

²²⁴ LS 71:1202.

However, even the formidable Empress Dowager Ruizhi could not protect her beloved niece forever. Once the empress dowager and Shengzong passed away, Empress Rende became a vulnerable target of ruthlessly ambitious Consort Shunsheng. While Empress Rende had few relatives left at the court, Consort Shunsheng came from an extensive family many of whose members began to occupy important offices in the military and the central administration during the last few years of Shengzong's reign. Her family was gradually emerging as the most powerful family in the following decades. Upon the accession of Xingzong, Consort Shunsheng fabricated a rumor that Empress Rende was conspiring against the throne and succeeded in expelling the latter out of the palace.²²⁵ She declared herself as the empress dowager regent and took over the reins of government and military. She is known in history by her posthumous title, Empress Qinai.²²⁶

Biography

Empress Qinai was the fifth generation descendant of Xiao Aguzhi, Empress Chunqin's younger brother. Her father, Xiao Taogui 蕭陶貴, held a tribal post of relative importance.²²⁷ Her childhood name was Noujin. When Noujin was still young, her

²²⁵ LS 71:1203-4; LS 18:211-2.

²²⁶ According to *Qidan guozhi*, Empress Qinai was referred to with her alternative title, Fatian, which was adopted when she assumed her regency. See QDGZ 13:132-3.

²²⁷ *Qidan guozhi* states that her father was Xiao Siwei 蕭思猥, who had served the post of Commissioner of Ping Prefecture. It further suggests that Empress Qinai was niece of Han Derang, the powerful Chinese Chancellor of the previous reign. I cannot confirm this claim in the *Liaoshi*, although I do not rule out the possibility that her family might have intermarried with the family of Han Derang after the latter received the imperial surname. QDGZ 8:1a-2b.

mother had a prophetic dream which implied that Noujin would bring a glory and prosperity to her family.²²⁸ In fact at least five of her brothers would later dominate the most important offices in the Liao administration throughout the reign of Xingzong, thanks to her, as we shall see below.

Years later, Noujin entered the imperial harem and succeeded in capturing Shengzong's attention with her good looks. She also served Empress Dowager Ruizhi with utmost courtesy and dedication to win her favor.²²⁹ She bore two sons, the eldest of who later succeeded the throne as Xingzong, and two princesses for Shengzong.²³⁰ During Shengzong's reign, Noujin repeatedly slandered Empress Rende by fabricating rumors that the latter was unfaithful to the emperor. Shengzong, however, discarded them.²³¹ Upon his death, he left a posthumous edict in which Empress Rende was designated as empress dowager and Noujin as Grand Consort (*taifei* 太妃). It seems that Shengzong was concerned about the fate of Empress Rende and intended to protect her from falling victim to Noujin. It is said that Noujin concealed the last edict of Shengzong and proclaimed herself Empress Dowager Fatian 法天皇太后.²³²

She quickly moved towards the direction of permanently eliminating her rival, Empress Rende. She again concocted an incriminating rumor and had it spread in the

²²⁸ LS 71:1203.

²²⁹ QDGZ 8:1a-2b; LS 71:1203.

²³⁰ Her second son was named Zhongyüan (d. 1063) and will be further discussed below in the context of Noujin's attempt to replace Xingzong with Zhongyüan. Her daughters were Yanmujin and Shuogu. Yenmujin is well known for her multiple marriages. She was married at least four times. See LS 65:1003-4.

²³¹ Noujin wrongfully accused Empress Rende, who was a skilled musician, for having an affair with a Chinese musician at court. She even fabricated a love letter and put it in the bedroom of the emperor, who just discarded the letter and ordered it to be burnt. See QDGZ 8:1A-2B and 13:132-3.

²³² QDGZ 8:1a-2b.

court that Empress Rende was plotting a conspiracy with a number of influential noblemen including at least two imperial sons-in-law, to usurp Xingzong.²³³ Empress Dowager Qinai seized this opportunity to carry out a massive purge that was directed at more than a hundred officials, the vast majority of whom were executed. Empress Qinai naturally sought the same penalty for Empress Rende as well, however, Xingzong, was reluctant to approve of such a harsh punishment for his foster mother. Even though he was the biological son of Qinai, he still retained a great affection and sympathy for Empress Rende because he had been raised by the latter since childhood. The unwillingness of her son did not discourage Qinai who succeeded in persuading him to order Empress Rende to be expelled from the palace for the time being. When Empress Rende arrived at the location of her exile somewhere in the Upper Capital Circuit, she encountered assassins dispatched by Empress Qinai and chose to commit suicide.²³⁴

As soon as Empress Dowager Qinai officially began her regency, she declared her birthday as a national holiday, held audiences, and received various envoys from the neighboring countries including the Song, Xi Xia and Koryŏ.²³⁵ She also generously bestowed many key offices and honorary titles to her close relatives and henchmen. One of her brothers, for instance, Xiao Xiaoxian, was granted with double appointment of the two highest offices in the administration, Northern Military Commissioner and Northern

²³³ The officials who were implicated in the charge of treason were Xiao Zubuli, Xiao Bidi 蕭匹敵, and Xiao Yanliu, among others. Xiao Bidi was married to sister of Shengzong and Xiao Zubuli was the first husband of Princess Yanmujin, the elder daughter of Qinai who is known to have married at least four times. See Twitchett and Tietze, 114; LS 18:211; LS 71:1202-3.

²³⁴ LS 71:1202-3.

²³⁵ LS 18:211-3; LS 71:1203.

Prime Minister, respectively in 1033.²³⁶ Situated at the pinnacle of power, however, the empress dowager was still not entirely satisfied. The unfortunate affairs involving the expulsion of Empress Rende perhaps made Empress Dowager Qinai realize that the young emperor was not as compliant as she had anticipated. Now she decided that he must be replaced with her second son, Zhongyüan 重元 (d. 1063), who she considered to be more obedient and easier to manipulate than Xingzong.

In 1034, Qinai clandestinely summoned her younger brothers to participate in the scheme of enthroning Zhongyüan. Ironically, Zhongyüan himself had no desire to take a part in his mother's scheme and reported the conspiracy in the making to his older brother. Xingzong immediately took steps to cancel his mother's authority as the regent by forcing her to surrender all the seals of office. He took over the conduct of government and military and began to govern on his own. Qinai was banished to Qingzhou 慶州, where the mausoleum of her husband, Shengzong, was located.²³⁷ Xingzong was greatly pleased with his younger brother's loyalty and honored him with the title of Grand Imperial Brother. Zhongyüan continued to receive various appointments to powerful offices throughout the reign of Xingzong.²³⁸

Qinai lived in exile only for five years. Xingzong soon regretted his decision to banish her and invited her back to the capital in 1039. Xingzong turned out to be a filial and devoted son, just as most Liao emperors were. Hoping to reconcile with his mother,

²³⁶ LS 87:1333-4.

²³⁷ It is largely based upon the biography of Empress Qinai in LS 71:1203-4. See Twitchett and Tietze, 115; Jennifer Holmgren, "Marriage, Kinship", 82; LS 112:1502.

²³⁸ LS 112:1501-2.

he frequently visited her residence to pay respect and even waited on her personally. However, none of his gestures seem to have been effective to change her frozen attitude towards him. It is said that she showed no signs of remorse when she heard the news of his sudden death at the young age of thirty-nine in 1055. She even reprimanded Xingzong's wife who was mourning for her deceased husband, stating that it was not necessary for a young woman like her to torment herself over the matter.²³⁹

When Xingzong's eldest son, Hongji 洪基, was declared as the next emperor whose temple name is Daozong 道宗 (r. 1055-1101), she was honored with the new title of grand empress dowager (*tai huang tai hou* 太皇太后).²⁴⁰ She lived three more years in a quiet and uneventful manner until she passed away in the winter of 1058 due to an illness.

Political Domination of Empress Qinai's family

Since Qinai had attempted to dethrone Xingzong in 1034, she was barred from participating in the court politics. The situation did not change very much even after she was allowed to return to the capital with the formal restoration of her damaged relationship with the emperor. It should not be thought, however, that she was powerless. On the contrary, it seems that she continued to command a considerable authority in the Liao court. Upon her return to the palace in 1039 she performed an important tribal

²³⁹ LS 71:1204; Twitchett and Tietze, 124. Xingzong's empress was posthumously honored with the title, Empress Renyi 仁懿皇后. She was the daughter of Xiao Xiaomu, one of Qinai's younger brothers.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; LS 21:253-6.

ceremony of “rebirth (再生禮)”, normally reserved for the emperors and occasionally for the empresses-dowager, to demonstrate her solid position to the fellow Khitan nobles.²⁴¹ The Song government also recognized her authority by resuming their regular ritual of sending her a separate set of envoys. Conversing with one of the Song envoys named Wang Gongchen 王拱辰 in 1054, she is said to have openly remarked on her preference of the fraternal succession of the throne to the lineal transmission in the presence of the emperor.²⁴² Whatever her intention was by making such a statement, she did not intervene in the imperial succession to enthrone her second son when Xingzong died in the following year.

Her regency was short-lived and there were no drastic changes in the administration in terms of domestic and foreign policies during her regency, except some of her brothers received generous promotions to powerful offices including chancellery. The reign of Xingzong was in general peaceful with little domestic and foreign conflicts. Most policies that had been initiated during the previous reign were continuously employed with little modifications. Although Qinai was shunned from decision-making process at the court, her brothers and her second son, Zhongyüan, continued to play a central role in the politics well into the reign of the next emperor, Daozong. At least five of her brothers, Xiaomu 孝穆, Xiaoxian 孝先, Xiaozhong 孝忠, Hui 惠 and Xiaoyou 孝友, subsequently held the post of Northern Prime Minister and were invested with the

²⁴¹ Twitchett and Tietze, 115; Wittfogel and Felg, 263; LS 18:222. The ceremony of rebirth will be discussed in further details in the chapter six.

²⁴² Twitchett and Tietze, 115, no. 113; *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* 177:4281-2.

honorary title of prince. Most of them rose to power during the last decade of Shengzong's reign. Xiaomu and Xiaoxian served various key offices including vicegerent of the Southern and Eastern Capital and were enfeoffed as prince by Shengzong. Xiaomu was the most influential of them all. He contributed greatly to the pacification of a large-scaled Bohai uprising erupted in 1029 in Eastern Capital.²⁴³ His younger brother, Hui, was doubtlessly one of the most important figures in the Liao military during the reign of Xingzong. He led numerous punitive campaigns to the western frontiers to subjugate Uighurs and the unruly Zubu tribes, including two separate expeditions to Xi Xia in 1048 and 1050.²⁴⁴ Sons of Empress Qinai's brothers continued to be dominant in the court of Daozong at least during the first half of his reign. From 1005 to 1077 Qinai's family produced as many as twelve Northern Prime Ministers and Northern Military Commissioners.²⁴⁵

The pattern of intermarriage between Empress Qinai's brothers and nephews and her daughters was much more complex and dense than that of Empress Chunqin or Ruizhi of the previous reigns. We will return to this issue for further discussion in the following chapter. Empress Qinai's eldest daughter, Princess Yanmujin 嚴母堇, for instance, is well known to have married four times. Her third husband was her matrilineal cousin, Xiao Hudu 蕭胡覩, who was son of Xiao Xiaoyou.²⁴⁶ After her

²⁴³ Wittfogel and Feng, 419-420; LS 87:1331; LS 17:203-4.

²⁴⁴ LS 17:199, 201, 206. For the summary of Khitan confrontation with the Xi Xia, see Twitchett and Tietze, 120-3 and Kim Wee-hyun, *Qidande Dongbei zhengce*, 125-130.

²⁴⁵ Ik-jou Choi, 89; Wittfogel and Feng, 452.

²⁴⁶ Xiao Hudu later conspired against Daozong attempting to enthrone Prince Zhongyuan in 1063.

divorce from him, she married to one of her maternal uncles, Xiao Hui.²⁴⁷ Shuogu, the second daughter of Empress Qinai, was also married to a different maternal uncle of hers, Xiao Xiaozhong.²⁴⁸ Moreover, one of Empress Qinai's nieces was appointed as empress of Xingzong. This was the eldest daughter of Xiao Xiaomu, who later received the official title of Empress Renyi and gave a birth to the eighth Liao emperor Daozong. Surrounded by his mother's kin in both public and private spheres, we can imagine how cautiously Xingzong must have navigated himself through the complicated network of power at the court. One might raise a question how much power the Liao emperor actually held, including Xingzong, when he was overwhelmed by his maternal relatives in the government and was under the constant scrutiny of their daughters in the inner palace.

On the surface, Xingzong maintained amicable relationship with his mother and his younger brother, Zhongyuan, to whom he continued to bestow powerful offices and generous gifts. However, it is possible that the emperor harbored a suspicion of their intent to some extent and was concerned about his son's future in case he prematurely died. Perhaps on purpose, he did not formally recognize his eldest son, Hongzhi, as heir apparent during his reign. Only on his deathbed, Xingzong declared him as his successor. It is impossible to know for sure if Zhongyuan indeed had anticipated his succession because he had been given the title of Grand Imperial Brother, the same title held by Lihu,

²⁴⁷ For Princess Yanmujin, see Wittfogel and Feng, 208, 233, 234, 266; LS 65:1003-4. Xiao Hudu was one of the most powerful figures during the first decade of Daozong's reign (Qingning Era, 1055-1064) until he joined Prince Zhongyuan in his ill-fated conspiracy of usurping Daozong in 1063. Hudu was wounded in battle and drowned. See his biography in LS 114:1513-4.

²⁴⁸ Xiaozhong presented a memorial in 1043 to argue that the dual administrations of north and south be united into one. See his biography in LS 81:1285. See also Wittfogel and Feng, 483.

the third son of Empress Chunqin a few generations earlier. Nevertheless, his mother, Empress Dowager Qinai, did not make any movements this time to engineer the succession in favor of him. The new emperor, Daozong continued to honor his uncle by granting him even more respectful title of Grand Imperial Uncle (*huangtaishu* 皇太叔) upon his accession. In 1058, Zhongyuan was given the full command of the entire Khitan military when he was appointed to Commander-in-Chief. A few years later, he was persuaded by Xiao Hudu, one of Empress Dowager Qinai's nephews, and by his son, Nielugu, into executing a plot to assassinate Daozong and usurp the throne. His dream was short-lived. Only a day after Zhongyuan was declared emperor by his attendants in the middle of fighting with the imperial armies, he was defeated and committed a suicide.²⁴⁹

We have seen above in the cases of Empresses Chunqin and Ruizhi that their power and authority were extended to their sons, daughters, and the members of their natal families. The same was true for the case of Empress Qinai. Her two daughters enjoyed a great social prestige and economic privilege, which is demonstrated well in the fact that they were granted an entrusted prefecture and a large number of slaves and bondsmen households, just as the daughters of Empress Ruizhi had been.²⁵⁰ Since investigating activities and privileges of Liao princess deserves a separate chapter, which will be followed by this one, I will limit my discussion on the princesses here.

²⁴⁹ See his biography in LS 112:1502; LS 64:988-9.

²⁵⁰ Each received four thousand bondsmen households and built prefectures named Cheng and Yi, respectively. See LS 37:448.

Conclusion

As we examined the cases of three Liao empresses-dowagers, we discovered that there are a few things that they had in common with each other. First, they were all biological mothers of the reigning emperors. Second, all three could rely on the support from the members of their natal families, such as fathers, brothers and nephews, who occupied key military and civil offices in the Liao central government. None of them came from an obscure or humble branch of the Xiao clan. In fact, almost all of imperial consorts recorded in the *Liaoshi* chapter on Empresses and Consorts (*houfei chuan*) came from the two illustrious branches of the Xiao clan, derived from two brothers of the first Liao empress, Chunqin, as mentioned earlier. Excluding the dynastic founder, Taizu, and Xingzong, all seven of Liao emperors were born to primary wives. Xingzong was born by Empress Qinai when she was a high-ranking consort of Shengzong. She was granted with the title of empress only after her son succeeded the throne.

Motherhood and illustrious family backgrounds appear to have been key factors for women's advancement to power in the Liao dynasty. They were undoubtedly important prerequisites for imperial consorts of all dynasties, whether foreign or native, aspiring to "power and prestige", but it seems that in the native Chinese regimes combination of those two factors was not always necessary for an imperial consort to obtain her advancement. In some rare cases, total lack of these conditions did not prevent women from achieving highest and most powerful position of empress-dowager regent. In the Song dynasty, out of a total of twenty two empresses, ten came from high-ranking official families, while five empresses are known to have come from humble origins with

no connections to the government offices. These five women began their career in the palace as service attendants or minor consorts with no ranks and gradually worked their way up by successfully capitalizing on their personal merits, such as beauty, intelligence, musical talent or even virtuous behavior in winning imperial favor. Empress Dowager Liu 劉 (969-1033) represents the most successful case of them all.²⁵¹ She is considered beyond dispute the most powerful empress of the Song dynasty. Her origin was certainly questionable, considering that she was an orphaned musical entertainer. There was even a rumor that she once worked as a prostitute before she entered the palace of Zhenzong 眞宗 (r. 998-1022), while he was a young prince. Her background was certainly an obstacle for her advancement at first but eventually Zhenzong named her empress in 1012, despite a serious opposition from his cabinet ministers. When Zhenzong died in 1022 leaving a twelve year old heir, Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1023-1063), Empress Liu was appointed as a regent. In that capacity she governed for eleven years until her death. What is even more remarkable about her success than her humble origin is that she was childless. Renzong was not her biological son but the son of a minor consort of Zhenzong, although this truth was concealed from him until his foster mother, Empress Liu, died.

While Empress Liu's career is hardly typical, her success story certainly raises some interesting points. As primary wife of her late husband, she was entitled to rule as a regent for the incoming emperor, regardless of maternity. In this sense, Empress Liu's

²⁵¹ See John W. Chaffee, "The Rise and Regency of Empress Liu (969-1033)", *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 31 (2001):1-25.

case seems to validate the argument of Jennifer Holmgren that “imperial wives of native Chinese dynasties were granted far greater legal authority and power than their counterparts of any non-Han regimes based in China, including the Liao.”²⁵² It is true that the Chinese system allowed widows of emperors a great authority to govern the state as a regent, to select or even depose an imperial heir. But this fact alone can be misleading. As I briefly mentioned earlier, the Chinese institution of regency was established as a necessary and expedient solution to deal with the times of crisis.²⁵³ Unexpected illness or death of the emperor was one of the most common sources of national crisis, particularly when he was survived by no heir. Luckily, when there were imperial heirs, they were not infrequently too young to govern. In addition, some emperors were simply uninterested in governing or so weak-minded that they were easily manipulated by their ambitious consorts. In order for an imperial wife to gain an access to power in Chinese dynasties, therefore, a number of conditions had to be fulfilled. First, bearing an imperial heir would be greatly advantageous for her in securing promotions to high-ranking positions, if not empress, during her husband’s reign. If she outlived her husband and all imperial wives senior to her, she would be able to wield a great power and authority as senior widow. Only then she was entitled to assume the role of a regent if the incoming emperor was a minor. Out of five Northern Song regents, three began their regency due to the minority of the emperors. One was appointed a regent to assist her ill husband. The last Northern Song regent was placed in the capacity because the

²⁵² Jennifer Holmgren, “Imperial Marriage”, 90.

²⁵³ Priscilla Chung, 69.

emperor was kidnapped by invading Jurchen army and the Northern Song collapsed. All of these cases testify that the female regents were appointed only in times of emergency as the last resort.

The circumstances under which the Liao empresses rose to power do not appear exactly identical to those in the cases of the Northern Song regents. According to the sources, Empress Chunqin did not have to wait until the death of her husband, Taizu, to exert her influence in the politics. On the contrary, she is known to have had commanded a great authority ever since the beginning of Taizu's career. Taizu is described to have been a virile and well-constituted man with excellent military skills. He was far from being feeble-minded and timid as the Song Zhenzong, Empress Dowager Liu's husband, is said to have been. When Liao Taizu died and Empress Chunqin took over the reins of government, all her sons were already mature adults in their twenties. Besides, the eldest son, Bei, was formally designated as heir apparent by his father so there was no valid reason to establish a regent from the perspective of the Chinese institutions. Although she formally relinquished her authority as a regent, as soon as the accession of Taizong was confirmed, it is well known that Taizong was under her influence during his twenty-year long reign.

The circumstances under which Empress Ruizhi and Empress Qinai assumed the regency appear to have corresponded to the Chinese cases described above for both Liao Shengzong and Xingzong were minors when they inherited the throne. However, Empress Ruizhi's rule lasted unusually long. Shengzong could not take over power as an independent sovereign, until his mother died after twenty seven-year rule. Shengzong

was already thirty-eight years old. Had Empress Qinai not attempted to usurp Xingzong to replace him with her younger son, she could have ruled the state for much longer time. After she came back from her exile, her influence at court does not appear to have been seriously reduced, considering that she underwent the Rebirth Ceremony on behalf of the emperor and that the Song government continued to send envoys to her. This was possible because she was supported by her powerful natal family, particularly her brothers, who occupied key positions at court. This was true for both Empress Chunqin and Empress Ruizhi whose most trusted allies and subjects were also their family members.

The political atmosphere of the Song dynasty was considerably different from that of the Liao. There was a consensus between Song emperors and literati officials that the imperial relatives were not to obtain important offices based upon their connections to the throne. Although some empresses managed to exercise their influence on the emperor in securing official posts for their family members, institutional restrictions and criticisms from the officials made it very difficult for them to place their clansmen in key positions.²⁵⁴ This lack of support from the natal family is one of the main causes of the limitation of the power held by the Song empresses-regents. Even Empress Liu, the most powerful and authoritative regent in Song history, could not dismiss the opinion of her ministers entirely in deciding matters of the state. In general, the Song scholar-officials,

²⁵⁴ Zhang Bangwei, *Songdai huangqin yu zhengzhi*, 162-166; John W. Chaffee, "The Rise and Regency of Empress Liu", 19-20.

as well as emperors themselves, looked upon the regency with a great anxiety and demanded the retirement of the regent once the emperor came of age.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Empress Dowager Liu and Empress Dowager Gao were asked by the officials to hand over power to Emperor Renzong and Zhezong, respectively but they refused to retire and ruled until their deaths. See Priscilla Chung, 70-74.

CHAPTER 5: IMPERIAL DAUGHTERS

Introduction

In the previous chapters, we investigated the cases of powerful imperial consorts by analyzing the patterns of marriage of the Liao emperors and their effect on the Liao power structure. In this chapter, our subject of observation will be another group of palace women, imperial daughters. As offspring of emperors and members of the imperial clan, the Liao princesses were naturally granted with unparalleled social statuses in addition to various political and economic privileges that they were entitled to pass down to their descendants. This is consistent with the practices of all dynasties that came before and after the Liao dynasty. As a rule, imperial daughters were considered permanent members of the imperial clan even after they got married or died and their prerogatives and statuses ought to be protected. Even by such standard, the privileges that the Liao princesses enjoyed appear exceptional. Some of them even received something like feudal estates that they could govern almost autonomously without much interference from the central government. However, what is particularly interesting about the Liao princesses is that they were not equal in terms of their official titles, social statuses of their husbands, and the privileges that they had received from their imperial fathers. First, I will attempt to investigate how they were discriminated. Was there a certain set of rules employed at the Liao court to determine the status of each imperial daughter? This will be followed by the description of the patterns of their marriages, which were undoubtedly the most important events of their lives. Our observation will

include selection of imperial sons-in-law, the wedding ceremony of a princess, and the princesses' relationships to their husbands. A particular attention will be given to the cases of divorce and multiple marriages.

Table of Princesses in the Liaoshi

The imperial clanswomen referred to with the title of princess (*gongzhu* 公主) in the *Liaoshi* can be categorized into three different subgroups. Naturally, all the daughters of the eight Liao emperors comprise the first group. The chapter of Table of Princesses (公主表) in the *Liaoshi* offers a list of total thirty-three of imperial daughters according to the order of their birth in a chronological manner, including Princess Yanshou 延壽公主, daughter of Crown Prince Zhaohuai 昭懷太子(1058-77), who in fact never reigned but was bestowed a posthumous title of emperor by his son, Tianzuo (r. 1102-1125).¹ The Table of Princesses provides brief biographical information on each princess, including her childhood name, formal title, the identity of her spouse and his office, if available, among other things.

The second group consists of the daughters of emperor's brothers who received the title of *gongzhu*. The *Liaoshi* states clearly that under the Liao institutions daughters of an emperor's brothers were entitled to receive a status equal to that of the daughters of

¹ LS 65:999-1012. Prince Zhaohuai was the eldest son of Daozong and Empress Xüanyi. The empress and the prince fell victims of slanderous accusations of their ruthless political opponent in the court, Yelü Yixin (d. 1083), whose successful manipulation of the emperor eventually brought about expulsion and death of the crown prince and his mother. Prince Zhaohuai was given a temple name, Shunzong 順宗, by his son. See the summary of the incident in Twitchett and Tietze, 133-4. See also LS 23:277-9; LS 71:1205; LS 62:945.

the emperor. It should be noted, however, that this prerogative was restricted to the daughters of emperor's brothers who had been born by the same biological mother as the emperor.² For instance, all three daughters of Shengzong's younger brother, Longqing 隆慶, who had been honored with the title of Grand Imperial Brother, were granted with the title of princess.³

The last group was comprised of the imperial clanswomen who are referred to with the title of *gongzhu* in the *Liaoshi*, although their names do not occur in the chapter of Table of Princesses. Some of these women were apparently remotely related to the throne but received the title of princess by special imperial order in order to serve a specific purpose in foreign diplomacy. In the *Liaoshi* two such cases can be identified. Genealogical positions of both of these women are unidentifiable within the imperial clan and they were enfeoffed with the title of princess prior to their marriage to the members of the ruling families of the states subordinate to the Liao. In 1020 and 1021, the king of the Dashi state 大食國 repeatedly requested a marriage alliance with the Liao court. Shengzong finally yielded to his wish by marrying the daughter of Husili 胡思里, a noble of princely rank, to the king after granting her the title of princess.⁴ Upon the accession

² LS 37:449.

³ Two of his daughters are identified in the *Liaoshi* as princesses. Princess Hanguo was married to Xiao Changyi 蕭昌裔 and established an entrusted prefecture in Weizhou 渭州. See LS 37:449. The other princess is only identified as daughter of Prince Qinjinguo, Yelü Longqing. She is said to have married Xiao Bidi 蕭匹敵. See his biography in LS 88:1343-4. Yelü Longqing is said to have had two additional daughters who are identified as Princess of Chenguo and Princess of Wuguo, according to tomb inscriptions. The tomb of Princess Chenguo and her husband Xiao Shaoju will be discussed in further details in the seventh chapter of this study. Little information is available on Princess Wuguo. See Zhu Zifang, "Liao Chenguo gongzhu, Xiao Jin muzhi chuyi", in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng* vol. 14, 247-253.

⁴ The genealogical position of Husili within the imperial clan is not known. See LS 16:189.

of Xingzong in 1031, another imperial kinswoman, entitled the Xingping Princess 興平公主, was given as wife to Li Yüanhao 李元昊, the son of Li Dezhao 李德照 (d. 1032), who was the crown prince of the state of Xi Xia 西夏 (1038-1227).⁵ No further information can be found in the *Liaoshi* on these two ladies except that they were not the daughters of the reigning emperors. It is almost certain that they did not come from the most prominent branch of the imperial clan, the Horizontal Tent 橫帳.⁶

As for the rest of the princesses whose names were not entered in the Table of Princesses, we can only speculate their genealogical positions and the reasons why they were excluded from the table. A certain Princess named Pugening is mentioned in the annals of the reign of Taizong that she visited the emperor with a group of tribesmen in 936.⁷ It is impossible to establish a genealogical position for her in the imperial lineage. Considering that she was not identified as daughter neither Taizu nor Taizong, it is possible that she was the daughter of one of Taizu's younger brothers.⁸ The second example is Princess Abuli, who was the daughter of Prince Bei, the original heir apparent of Taizu, and the younger sister of Shizong. She was married to Northern Chancellor, Xiao Han, but both of them were accused of taking a part in a conspiracy against Shizong in 948. She fell ill in the prison and died while her husband was executed.

⁵ The Liao princess and her royal husband did not get along. When she died in 1038, the Liao court dispatched an envoy, Yelü Xucheng, in order to investigate the circumstances of her death. Twitchett and Tietze, 121; LS 18:213 and 220; LS 115:1526.

⁶ For a general overview of the practice of the Chinese dynasties, see Jennifer Holmgren, "A Question of Strength: Military Capability and Princess Bestowal in Imperial China's Foreign relations (Han to Ch'ing)", *Monumenta Serica* 39 (1990): 31-85.

⁷ LS 3:38.

⁸ Zhu Zifang, 249.

In this study, our attention will be focused mostly on the first group of princesses—the daughters of the Liao emperors. The *Liaoshi* chapter on princesses will serve us as the fundamental source of information. Three daughters of the last Liao emperor, Tianzuo, will be excluded from our discussion because little information is available in the *Liaoshi* on their lives after the Liao dynasty fell and they were captured by the invading Jin forces.

Gongzhu 公主, jünzhu 郡主 and xianzhu 縣主

Like the Mongol and the Manchu princesses of the early Qing era, Liao princesses possessed personal names, which are recorded in the *Liaoshi*.⁹ Normally upon their betrothal, they were invested with the appropriate official titles by which they are known to us. According to the Table of Princesses in the *Liaoshi*, twenty-four princesses out of thirty received the official title of *gongzhu*. Of those twenty-four princesses, nine had been formerly enfeoffed with the less prestigious titles of Commandary Princess (*jünzhu*) and County Princess (*xianzhu*) and were promoted to the status of *gongzhu* later in their lives or posthumously. It is difficult to discern from the *Liaoshi* the criteria by which the titular ranks of the imperial daughters were determined. At best, they appear arbitrary and inconsistent, compared to, for example, those of the Tang and the Song dynasties. According to the Tang and Song system, paternal aunts of the reigning emperors received the title of Great Senior Princess (*dachang gongzhu* 大長公主) and sisters of the emperor

⁹ Evelyn S. Rawski, *Last Emperors*, 129.

Senior Princess (*chang gongzhu* 長公主). The daughters of the emperor were titled *gongzhu*, while *jūnzhu* was reserved for the daughters of the heir-apparent and *xianzhu* for the daughters of other sons of the emperor (*wang* 王). Daughters of other imperial kinsmen of princely rank were referred to as *wongzhu* 翁主.¹⁰ As for the Liao, not all the daughters of emperor seem to have been entitled to the same status, rank and privileges. It appears, generally speaking, that the status of their mothers was one of the significant factors in determining their ranks and in selecting suitable spouses for their marriages, as we shall see below.

As we have discussed above, normally there was only one empress at a time in the Liao inner palace and all the Liao empresses came from the two prominent branches of the Xiao clan which had obtained a permanent and exclusive lien on providing wives for the imperial clan. The Xiao women from less distinguished branches of the clan, as well as women of non-Khitan origins, mostly of Chinese or Bohai ethnicity, were admitted into the imperial harem. All nine princesses who initially received the titles of *jūnzhu* 郡主 and *xūanzhu* 縣主 were the daughters of Shengzong by his lesser consorts. Shengzong had at least ten consorts, nine of whom bore him a total of fourteen daughters and six sons. The list of them is provided below. Since Shengzong was one of the only two Liao emperors, who reached the age of sixty, and was most prolific in producing

¹⁰ John W. Chaffee, "The Marriage of Sung Imperial Clanswomen", in *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese History*, eds. Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 133-169, particularly, 142-3; Zhu Zifang, 249.

offspring, it will be extremely useful for us to compare the titles and statuses held by his fourteen daughters.

Table 2. Fourteen Daughters of Emperor Shengzong (r. 982-1031)

Shengzong's consorts	Birth order of princesses	Shengzong's daughters	Changes in the titles
Empress Rende 仁德 皇后		No children	
Precious Consort (Guifei 貴妃)	1	Yange 燕哥	Princess Suiguo (隨國公主)-Princess Qinguo (秦國公主)-Senior Princess Songguo (宋國長公主)
Empress Qinai 欽哀皇后	2	Yanmujin 嚴母董	Princess Weiguo (魏國公主) in the seventh year of the Kaifeng era (1018)-Qinjin Senior Princess 秦晉長公主-Grand Senior (大長) added to the title during the early Qingning era (1056-1064)
	3	Shuogu 槩古	Princess Yueguo 越國公主-promoted to Jinguo Princess 晉國公主-Jinshu Senior Princess 晉蜀長公主-Grand Senior Princess during the Qingning era.
Miss Xiao 蕭氏 (no.1)	4	Cuiba 崔八	Commandary Princess Namyang 南陽郡主-later promoted to Gongzhu
	5	Taoge 陶哥	Commandary Princess Changning 長寧郡主-later promoted to gongzhu
Miss Xiao 蕭氏 (no. 2)	6	Zhenni 鈿匿	Commandary Princess Pingyuan 平原郡主-later promoted to Xingguo Princess 荊國公主
Miss Ma 馬氏	7	Jiuge 九哥	Commandary Princess Xunyang 尋陽郡主-later promoted to gongzhu
Miss Da 大氏	8	Changshou 長壽	Commandary Princess Linhai 臨海郡主-later promoted to gongzhu
Miss Bai 白氏	9	Bage 八哥	County Princess Dongchang 同昌縣主-later promoted to gongzhu
	10	Shige 十哥	Commandary Princess Sanhe 三河郡主-later promoted to gongzhu
	11	Boshi 擘失	County Princess Renshou 仁壽縣主-later promoted to gongzhu
	12	Taige 泰哥	No records of enfeoffment
Miss Li 李氏	13	Saige 賽哥	Commandary Princess 金鄉郡主-later promoted to gongzhu
Miss Ai 艾氏	14	Xingge 興哥	No records of enfeoffment

Source: Table of Princesses in the *Liaoshi*

As shown above, the background of the consorts whose daughters had initially been given the titles of Commandary or Country Princess appears quite diverse.

Discerning from their surnames, we can speculate that at least four of them were Chinese and Miss Da must have been a Bohai. It is difficult to establish any coherent pattern or principle behind the way that those titles were assigned. Considering that two daughters of Empress Qinai and Shengzong's eldest daughter from a titled consort were given the title of *gongzhu* from the beginning, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the official status of an imperial consort was transferred to her daughter to a considerable degree. Even if this was indeed the case, it is still difficult to explain why the four daughters of Miss Bai were granted different titles since the information on the circumstances surrounding their investment is scarce. What appears certain is that a princess could be demoted to the inferior rank and her privileges canceled under special circumstances. For instance, Princess Saige, daughter of Miss Li, was found guilty of killing an innocent slave in 1017. She was demoted to the rank of County Princess.¹¹ We will return to her case later. Princess Aiyin 蔼因, the daughter of Anduan, one of Taizu's younger brothers, is also recorded in the *Liaoshi* as *wongzhu*, not a princess, despite the fact that Anduan and Taizu were born by the same mother. It is possible that she was demoted to *wongzhu* from her initial rank of *gongzhu*, which was resulted from her father's repeated participations in the revolts against Taizu.¹²

As for the cases of imperial daughters who did not receive any official titles from the court, such as the twelfth and the fourteenth daughters of Shengzong, the *Liaoshi*

¹¹ The biography of her husband, Xiao Duyü, states that she was demoted to Commandary Princess, not County Princess, for the crime. See his biography in LS 93:1378. See also LS 15:179; Wittfogel and Feng, 232.

¹² See her husband, Xiao Haili's biography in LS 78:1266; Zhu Zifang, 249.

provides even less information. Here are presented four of such cases, excluding the aforementioned daughters of Shengzong.

Table 3. The List of Princesses with No Official titles

Names	Parental information	Important dates	Spouses
Zhigu 質古	Taizu and Empress Chunqin	Died of illness probably in 914	Northern Prime Minister, Xiao Shilu 蕭室魯
Chaogui 嘲瑰	Second daughter of Taizong (mother unknown)	Died during the early Yingli era (951-970)	Northern Prime Minister, Xiao Haili 海黎
Sala 撒刺	Third daughter of Shizong and Empress Huaijie 懷節皇后		Xiao Woli 斡里
Shuge 淑哥	Fourth daughter of Jingzong from a Bohai consort (surname unknown)	Married Lü Jun in 980 (the second year of the Qianheng era)	Lü Jun (divorced) and Xiao Shennu

Source: Table of Princesses in the *Liaoshi*

It is possible that some of them died prematurely before the bestowal of a title was arranged. A look into the case of Princess Zhigu, the only daughter of Taizu and Empress Chunqin, however, might suggest another possibility. She was married to one of her mother's brothers, or half-brothers, Xiao Shilu 蕭室魯, who had been the first Xiao to serve the post of Northern Chancellor.¹³ The annals in the *Liaoshi* provides very cryptic and incomplete accounts on the events during the first few years of Taizu's reign, but it seems clear that Xiao Shilu was involved in the rebellion led by Taizu's younger brothers and uncle in 913. The revolt failed and soon he was captured by the imperial army led by his own brother, Xiao Dilu, while he was attempting to kill himself in vain.¹⁴ The annals further record that Xiao Shilu's wife, Yuludugu 餘盧覲姑, also participated

¹³ He is sometimes referred to with his alternative name Xiala 轄刺. See LS 1:3.

¹⁴ Wittfogel and Feng, 412; LS 1:7.

in the rebellion.¹⁵ Although different names were used in the annals and in the chapter on the Liao princesses, they seem to refer to the same person, the only daughter of Taizu. The annals indeed identified Yuludugu as a member of the imperial clan.¹⁶ Therefore, it is perhaps safe to conclude that Princess Yuludugu, otherwise known as Zhigu, and her husband, Shilu, joined the conspiracy of the younger brothers of Taizu. It is impossible to speculate what their motives could have been without pertinent information in the sources. All we know is that she fell ill and died in imprisonment while awaiting her trial and interrogation. It is possible that her participation in the treacherous activity prevented her from receiving a formal title of princess. As for the other three princesses, no information on their lives is available in the *Liaoshi* except the identity of their spouses, which makes it impossible for us to speculate the reasons of their being excluded from the formal investiture.

Marriage of the Liao Princesses-Selecting their spouses

In the previous section of this study, we have observed that all of the three powerful Liao empress-dowagers clearly preferred marrying their daughters to their brothers or maternal nephews. Except for a few Xiao men whose genealogical positions are unknown, almost all the imperial sons-in-law were closely related to each other, which suggests that the

¹⁵ LS 1:9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, See also Yan Wanchang, “*Liaoshi* gongzhu biao buzheng [A Supplementary study to the *Liaoshi* Princess Table]”, in *Liao Jin shi lunji*, ed. Chen Shu, (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1987), 14-41, particularly, 15-6.

pool from which the imperial sons-in-law were usually recruited within the Xiao clan was very small, as it is manifested in the chart below.

Table 4. Marriage Relations of Imperial Princesses¹⁷

Generation	Name (Princess)	Genealogical Position	Name (Husband)	Genealogical position
2	(a) Zhigu	Taizu's daughter by Empress Chunqin	(1) Xiao Shilu	A's Mother's brother
3	(b) Lübugu	Taizong's first daughter	(2) Xiao Siwen (father of Empress Ruizhi)	Son of a Xiao man in the same generation as her father's mother;
	(c) Chaogui	Taizong's second daughter	(3) Xiao Haili **	A Xiao man in c's mother's generation
5	(d) Guanyinnü	First daughter of Jingzong by Empress Ruizhi	(4) Xiao Jixian	D's mother's brother; (2)'s adopted son
	(d') Changshounü	Second daughter of Jingzong by Empress Ruizhi	(5) Xiao Paiya	5 th generation descendant of (1)'s (half) younger brother
	(d'') Yanshounü	Third daughter of Jingzong by Empress Ruizhi	(6) Xiao Hengde	(5)'s younger brother
6	(e) Yange	Shengzong's first daughter from a concubine	(7) Xiao Pili 匹里	A Xiao man in e's father's first wife's generation. His daughter was a titled consort of Xingzong
	(f) Yanmujin (married four times)*	Shengzong's second daughter from Empress Qinai	Xiao Cho-pu (8) Xiao Haili 海里 (second husband) (9) Xiao Hudu (third husband) (10) Xiao Hui (fourth husband)	Unidentified F's mother's brother (Haili was different name of Xiao Xiaoxian) F's mother's brother's son F's mother's brother
	(g) Shuogu	Shengzong's third daughter by Empress Qinai	(11) Xiao Xiaozhong	G's mother's brother
	(h) Cuiba 崔八	Shengzong's fourth daughter by a concubine	(12) Xiao Xiaoxian 孝先	(h)'s father's second wife's younger brother
	(i) Dianni 鈿匿	Shengzong's sixth daughter by a	(13) Xiao Shuanggu	(3)'s grandson and (14)'s son.

¹⁷ Wittfogel and Feng, 208-9.

Generation	Name (Princess)	Genealogical Position	Name (Husband)	Genealogical position
		concubine	雙古	
	(j) Saige 賽哥	Shengzong's thirteenth daughter by a concubine	(14) Xiao Duyü 圖玉	(3)'s son
7	(k) Bajin 跋芹*	Xingzong's first daughter by Empress Renyi	(15) Xiao Saba 撒八 (first husband) (16) Xiao Asu 阿速 (second husband)	(k)'s father's mother's brother's son; son of a brother of (10), (11) and (12). (k)'s father's mother's brother's son; (11)'s son.
	(l) Wolitai	Xingzong's second daughter by Empress Renyi	(17) Xiao Yuliye 余里也	L's father's mother's brother's son's son; (16)'s son?
8	(m) Jiuli*	Daozong's second daughter by Empress Xüanyi	(18) Xiao Dabuye 撻不也 (first husband) (19) Xiao Eduwo 訛都幹(second husband; (18)'s younger brother	M's father's father's mother's brother's son's son M's father's father's mother's brother's son's son
	(n) Teli 特里*	Daozong's third daughter by Empress Xüanyi	(20) Xiao Chouwo (21) Xiao Temo 特末	N's father's father's mother's brother's son's son Father's father's mother's brother's son's son's son

Adapted from Karl Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, "Marriage Relations: Imperial Princesses".

* indicates princesses who had more than one marital partners.

** Xiao Haili (3) and Xiao Haili (8) refer to entirely different individuals.

From the reign of Shengzong and on, we can see that Empress Qinai's brothers and their descendants, the members of the Junior Patriarchal Households (少父房) of Imperial Maternal Uncles (國舅帳), completely dominated in providing husbands for the imperial princesses. The two brothers, Xiao Paiya and Xiao Hengde, who married

Jingzong's daughters in the preceding generation, also came from this branch.¹⁸ The successful domination of the Junior Patriarchal Lineage was in part due to its capability in generating a large number of male offspring. As we discussed earlier, Empress Qinai had at least six brothers, all of whom reached to the prominent offices in the Liao court and generated numerous sons and grandsons.

The Liao empresses were neither the first nor the only women who liked to arrange marriage of their daughters to the members of their natal family. On the contrary, it had been generally favored by women of all levels of the Chinese society throughout the history. The imperial household of the Northern Song dynasty was no exception.¹⁹ A favorite daughter of the Song Renzong (r.1023-1063) was married to the nephew of his mother, to give an example.²⁰ Imperial wives generally strove to continue the marriage alliance between the imperial family and their natal families with an obvious goal of providing their clansmen with the channels to the government bureaucracy and other privileges. Earlier we have remarked on the aspect of Chinese social institutions that tolerated the matrimonial unions between matrilineal cross-cousins while showing a strong abhorrence for the cross-generational marriages between relatives, such as the one between a maternal uncle and a niece. On the other hand, such unions seem to have been

¹⁸ The alternate names of Beiye 悖野 and Kengtou 肯頭 were used in referring to Paiya and Hengde in the Chinese sources including *Qidan guozhi* and *Xu Zizhi Tongjian changbian*, which also provide different genealogical information on them from the *Liaoshi*. Paiya is said to have been Empress Ruizhi's nephew and Kengde was his maternal uncle. See XZTC 55:1206; QDGZ13:130-2.

¹⁹ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 67.

²⁰ Jennifer Holmgren, "Imperial Marriage", 70-71. Princess Yanguo, beloved daughter of the Song emperor, Renzong, was married to a nephew of Renzong's late mother, Empress Changyi. See John W. Chaffee, "The Marriage of Sung Imperial Clanswomen", 153.

particularly favored by the Khitan imperial family for many Khitan princesses married their maternal uncles, as we can see above.²¹ The case of the aforementioned younger brother of Shengzong, Yelü Longqing, can demonstrate well many unique characteristics of the marriage of the Liao imperial offspring. Longqing's first wife was the eldest daughter of his elder sister, Guanyinnu, identified as Great Senior Princess of Qinjinguo in her tomb inscription.²² His second and third wives were the daughters of his younger sister, Changshounu.

Disregard for generational difference in marriage can be also seen in Chaogui's marriage to Xiao Haili (3).²³ Although Haili's genealogical position in the Xiao clan is not entirely clear, it appears that he was at least one or two generation senior to the princess, considering the fact that he had been previously married to Princess Aiyin, daughter of Taizu's younger brother, Anduan.²⁴ Strictly speaking, Chaogui's father, Taizong, and Aiyin belonged to the same generation as cousins. Haili's son and grandson, Düyü, and Shuanggu, respectively, married concurrently to the sixth and the thirteenth daughter of Shengzong. Like Xiao Haili, some imperial sons-in-law repeatedly married princesses. One of Empress Qinai's younger brothers, Xiao Xiaoxian (8) first married Shengzong's fourth daughter, Cuiba, who was killed by the rebels during the Bohai revolt

²¹ A taboo on intergenerational marriage was generally observed and rarely violated. Jennifer Holmgren, "Imperial Marriage", 68.

²² See Zheng Shaozhong, "Qidan Qinjinguo Dachang Gongzhu muzhiming", *Kaogu* 8(1962):429-435; Zhu Zifang, 247-253.

²³ Karl Wittfogel called Xiao Haili "a social outsider" in the Liao court because no other Northern Prime Minister can be traced to his family lineage. Wittfogel and Feng, 451-3; LS78:1266.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Aiyin and Haili must have gotten married sometime during the Tianlu (947-951) era. The marriage was dissolved when Aiyin was incriminated jointly with her brother, Yelü Chage, who assassinated Shizong in 951. See Chage's biography in LS 113:1499.

in 1029. Subsequently, he got remarried to his own niece, Princess Yanmujin, the daughter of Shengzong and Empress Qinai.²⁵

Another unusual feature of the Khitan marriages from the Chinese perspective was levirate. Princess Jiuli, second daughter of Daozong, is said to have married two brothers in succession, according to the *Liaoshi*. Her first husband Dabuye fell victim of a factional struggle, instigated by the notorious and the most powerful official of the time, Yelü Yixin, that also claimed the life of Daozong's heir apparent, Prince Zhaohuai. Upon Dabuye's death, his younger brother, who belonged to the clique of Yelü Yixin, wished to marry the princess. She initially resisted his proposal but was eventually forced into marrying him.²⁶ This case clearly suggests that the custom of levirate, widely upheld by various peoples of the north Asiatic steppes, was not only very much alive as late as the reign of Daozong but also was compulsory in some cases such as this one.

While the daughters of empresses and other Khitan consorts from lesser branches of the Xiao clan were generally married to the Xiao clansmen in key military offices, marital partners of the daughters of Chinese and Bohai consorts were more diverse, ranging from Bohai and Chinese officials to Khitan nobles. No daughters of empresses were given to the officials of Bohai or Chinese background.²⁷ Bage and Boshi, the ninth and the eleventh daughter of Shengzong by his Chinese consort, Miss Bai (Table 2), were married to Liu Sangu and Liu Siduan 劉四端, respectively, both of whom were Chinese

²⁵ Princess Yanmujin married at least four times according to the *Liaoshi*. Xiao Xiaoxian was her second husband. Wittfogel and Feng, 419-20; LS 17:205-7; LS 87:1333.

²⁶ LS 65:1008-9.

²⁷ Wittfogel and Feng, 228 no. 17.

officials.²⁸ A Bohai noble, Da Liqiu 大力秋, was selected as suitable spouse for Changshou, the eighth daughter of Shengzong by a Bohai consort, Miss Da (Table 2). When Da Liqiu died, she was remarried to a Xiao clansman. The same pattern of marriage can also be seen in the case of Princess Shuge, fourth daughter of Jingzong by a Bohai consort (Table 3). She was first married to a Chinese official, Lü Jun, but soon divorced him due to incompatibility, and then married a Xiao. We will come back to these cases later when we discuss multiple marriages of Liao princesses.

Overall, almost all of the Liao imperial sons-in-law had already held influential offices at the court prior to their betrothals to the princesses. Some were even serving in the highest post, Northern Prime Minister. Normally, imperial sons-in-law were granted honorary titles (*fuma duwei* 駙馬都尉) and promotions in their official ranks from the throne, in addition to generous gifts in various forms that accompanied the princesses.

Ritual Aspects of Princesses' Marriages

As a member of the imperial clan, a princess could only marry *down* and the superiority of her status over her husband and his family was well demonstrated in the wedding ceremony. Starting with deciding on the match and a date for the occasion, the imperial family took the leading role in the entire process of the ceremony, a pattern

²⁸ See LS 65:1006. There are no separate biographical entries of these two men in LS. Wittfogel cites an old source called *Rulin gongyi* 儒林公議, which records that Liu Sangu later defected to the Song to avoid such marriage. Wittfogel and Feng, 228, n. 17. For *Rulin gongyi*, see *Congshu jicheng* 叢書集成, n. 2793.

which contrasted greatly with the weddings of the rest of the population.²⁹ The bridegroom was called into the court to pay his respects to the emperor and the empress, who arranged a lavish feast for the two families involved. Then the groom was granted assorted gifts, including formal court clothes and a complete set of horse-riding gear, as well as horses. The princess was also presented with numerous sumptuous gifts, among which a pair of camel-driven carriages are most noteworthy. They were colorfully decorated with blue-curtains with dragon-shaped head ornament and silver coverings. More interestingly, she was given another carriage decorated with simple brocade and hanging bells. It was driven by oxen and carried a sacrificial sheep inside. This was meant to be used for her funeral, perhaps for transporting her corpse. The funerary objects to adorn her corpse were also provided.

That the princess was given a complete set of funerary gear from the throne on her wedding day was a symbol of her continuing membership in the imperial clan after her marriage and even after her death. Normally a wedding ceremony signified that the bride would leave her natal family for good to enter that of her husband. This was not the case for the marriage of a princess. The Liao funerary rituals will be discussed further in the chapter seven of this study.

Princesses of the Song and Qing dynasty could receive their dowries in the form of land, in addition to traditional valuables such as silk and jewelry.³⁰ There is no doubt

²⁹ The betrothal process and the wedding ceremony of the Manchu princesses were similar in some aspects to those of the Khitans. See Evelyn S. Rawski, *Last Emperors*, 148-9. For the description of the wedding of a princess, see LS 52:864-5. Karl Wittfogel offers a translated version of the passage in Wittfogel and Felg, 227.

³⁰ Evelyn S. Rawski, *Last Emperors*, 148-9.

that the Liao imperial daughters also received gifts in the form of land or labor, such as slaves and bondsmen, but not necessarily as their dowry. The *Liaoshi* chapter on the geography of the empire lists at least four prefectures entrusted to princesses under the heading of *touxia* 頭下州.³¹ Hui Prefecture (Huizhou 徽州) was established by the eldest daughter of Jingzong with ten thousand slave households that she had received from her mother, Empress Ruizhi.³² Two daughters of Shengzong were also granted prefectures named Cheng 成州 and Yi 懿州, respectively. Each held four thousand households.³³ Prefecture Wei 渭州 and one thousand slave households were given to Princess of Hanguo, Shengzong's niece, and her husband, Xiao Changyi 蕭昌裔. She was the daughter of Grand Imperial Brother, Longqing 隆慶.³⁴

The princesses were given the authority to govern their prefectures almost autonomously. They were permitted to appoint administrative officials at their will except for the post of Commanding Prefect (*jiedushi* 節度使), a supervising official sent from the central government. They were entitled to collect taxes of various kinds except for the wine tax, which was to be delivered to the Salt and Iron Office in the capital. With a large number of slave households, they could build walled cities within their

³¹ In the *Liaoshi*, *touxia* is also written with a different Chinese character *tou* 投. Karl Wittfogel considered it a transcription of originally a Qidan word which was affiliated with the Mongol verbal stem *tüši-*, meaning “rely on, to trust”. See Wittfogel and Feng, 65 no. 29. For a general study on the Liao entrusted prefectures, see Chen Shu, *Qidan shehui zhengzhi shi gao*, (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1978), 17-24.

³² LS 37:448-9; LS 65:1001; Wittfogel and Feng, 66. It is said to have been located about seven hundred *li* south of Upper Capital, which falls into the modern day Fuxin County in Liaoning Province.

³³ *Ibid.*, Chengzhu was located about 740 *li* south of the Upper Capital and Yizhou 800 *li* southeast from it. Both of them must have been located in modern day Liaoning Province.

³⁴ LS 37:449.

territories and were authorized to maintain private armies.³⁵ Liao slaves and bondsmen were largely former captives of war. Considering that all of the four princesses mentioned here received their grants of slaves during the reign of Shengzong, there is little doubt that these were Chinese soldiers and farmers captured by the Khitan army during the Song war.

Divorce and Remarriage

As we discussed above, marrying a princess brought not only honor but also considerable wealth, not to mention the political advantages, to her husband and his family. However, not all the imperial sons-in-law could maintain their fortunate positions permanently.

Xiao Duyü 蕭圖玉, for instance, who was married to the thirteenth daughter of Shengzong, Princess Saige 賽哥 (Table 2 and 4), was deprived of his official position when it was discovered that the princess had killed an innocent slave. Düyu was held responsible for being incapable of controlling his own household.³⁶

Xiao Hengde 蕭恒德, the husband of Princess Yanshou (Table 4), the youngest daughter of the formidable empress, Ruizhi, suffered a far worse fate than Duyü. Hengde was one of the leading commanders in the Khitan military during the first decade of Shengzong's reign. According to the *Liaoshi*, the princess died at the young age of twenty one. As to the cause of her death, there is a considerable discrepancy between the

³⁵ Only the members of the Horizontal Tents, Imperial Maternal Uncles, and princesses were authorized to build walled cities. Wittfogel and Feng, 65-6; LS 37:448-9.

³⁶ This case occurred in the 6th year of Kaifeng era (1017). Princess Saige was ordered to be demoted to the title of Xianzhu as a consequence. See LS 15:179; LS 65:1007. For the biography of Xiao Duyu see LS 93:1378.

accounts in the *Liaoshi* and in other Chinese sources, such as *Qidan guozhi*. The *Liaoshi* claims that Yanshou fell ill and a palace attendant was dispatched to care for her by the special order of Empress Ruizhi, who was particularly indulgent to her youngest daughter. It is said that Hengde began to have an illicit relationship with this attendant. Upon the death of the princess, Empress Ruizhi learned of this affair and was outraged. She subsequently ordered her son-in-law to kill himself.³⁷ On the other hand, *Qidan guozhi* explains the cause of the princess' death as an accident. She was hit by an antlered deer during her hunting excursion and died from the wound. The empress held Hengde responsible for the unfortunate event and had him killed so that he could accompany the princess to death.³⁸

Remarriage of widowed and divorced princesses was not uncommon and it seems to have been well received by the members of the ruling clans. It was by no means a unique phenomenon of the Liao dynasty. For instance, the Tang princesses are well known for being subject to far less social restrictions and for enjoying greater freedom than their counterparts in any other Chinese dynasties, when it comes to remarriage. Out of a hundred-thirty Tang princesses, twenty-seven married twice while three married three times. However, during the Song dynasty, the number of remarriages among the imperial daughters sharply decreased. Out of forty-one princesses, only two remarried after being widowed.³⁹ This number is considerably lower than the Liao dynasty that

³⁷ See Xiao Hengde's biography in LS 88:1342.

³⁸ Xu Zizhi *tongjian chang bian* repeats almost identical accounts to those in *Qidan guozhi*. QDGZ 13:130-132; XZTC 55:1207.

³⁹ Zhang Bangwei, *Songdai huangqin yu zhengzhi*, 119-200. The two Song princesses who remarried were Princess Yanguo, the younger sister of the Song Taizu (r. 960-976) and Princess Rongde

produced only a total of thirty-five princesses, five of whom were married more than once. Out of those five princesses, at least three of them are said to have been divorced. Incompatibility was a valid and acceptable reason for a divorce, as can be seen in the case of Princess Shuge, Jingzong's fourth daughter (Table 3). In 983, it was reported to the emperor (Shengzong) that the princess and her husband, Lü Jun, who had gotten married three years earlier, were not getting along with each other. An edict was issued to grant them a divorce.⁴⁰ Princess Yanmujin, the eldest daughter of Shengzong by Empress Qinai, married an unprecedented four times. It appears that her first husband, Xiao Chuobu, was involved in the power struggle between Empress Qinai and the original empress of Shengzong, Empress Rende, immediately following the death of the emperor. He was put to death on the charge of treason by the order of Empress Qinai, his own mother-in-law.⁴¹ Subsequently Princess Yanmujin married one of her maternal uncles but soon divorced him because they did not get along well with each other. Her third marriage was with one of her matrilineal cousin, which was again ill-fated due to incompatibility.⁴² There was only one princess who approaches the record of Yanmujin for having multiple spouses. Princess Bajin, the eldest daughter of Xingzong by Empress Renyi, was first married to Xiao Saba but divorced him citing irreconcilable differences.

榮德帝姬, the daughter of Huizong (r. 1100-1126). For more on the Song princesses, see Zhang Bangwei, 90-121.

⁴⁰ LS 10:110-111; Wittfogel and Feng, 258.

⁴¹ LS 18:211. Karl Wittfogel suggested that Chuobu appears with his two alternative names of Zubuli and Zubu in the *Liaoshi*. If it was indeed the case, Chuobu must have been the younger brother of Empress Rende. See Wittfogel and Feng, 266 no. 122.

⁴² See Table 3 for the names of all of her spouses. The biography of her second husband, Xiao Haili, can be found in LS 87:1333-4. For more information on her third husband, Xiao Hudu, see LS 114:1513-4. No biography is provided in the *Liaoshi* for her fourth husband Xiao Hui.

Subsequently, she married Xiao Asu. This marriage did not last either for she was intriguingly accused of “not cultivating the prescribed wifely etiquette” and ordered to be confined in the Central Capital. Later she was remarried to Xiao Woni.⁴³

Divorce was also authorized when it was discovered that the husband of a princess was involved with a serious crime, particularly treason or rebellion, as is clearly demonstrated in the case of the eighth daughter of Shengzong, Princess Changshou (Table 4). In such cases, divorce was mandatory. Daozong’s second daughter, Teli, was ordered to divorce her first husband Xiao Chouwo, older brother of Huifei, the second empress of Daozong. Both Huifei and Xiao Chouwo suffered demotion and deprivation of ranks and status when they were subject to the joint penalty for the crimes incurred by their mother, Lady Yanguo (燕國夫人).⁴⁴ Huifei was eventually reduced to the status of commoner and expelled from the capital to serve at the imperial mausoleum, meanwhile Chouwo was seized and incorporated into a military camp as an attendant after his marriage to his princess wife was dissolved.

If an imperial clanswoman did not wish to divorce her husband, who was being charged with a crime, she was considered extraordinarily virtuous. A certain Yelü Nü 耶律奴 was married to Xiao Yixin 意辛, who was the daughter of Princess Hudu 胡獨. He later got involved in the violent factional struggle that culminated in the deposing of Crown Prince Zhaohui in 1077 during the reign of Daozong. Caught in the turmoil, he

⁴³ The original phrase in the *Liaoshi* reads as follows, “以婦道不修 徒中京”. No information on her third husband, including his genealogical position, is available in the *Liaoshi*. See LS 65:1007-8.

⁴⁴ She was accused of seducing Prince of Liang (梁王) and was put to death in the 6th year of Dakang. See Hashiguchi Kaneo, 186-7; Twitchett and Tietze, 136 no. 201; LS 100:1429.

became a victim of a vicious slander and was wrongfully accused of a crime. He was stripped of his noble rank and sentenced to be exiled to a remote area as a military camp attendant.⁴⁵ The emperor wished the marriage annulled because Xiao Yixin was an imperial relative. However, she refused to leave her incriminated husband on moral grounds. Her argument that a wife should not abandon her husband in times of trouble and inconvenience reminds us of reproof of a Confucian moralist of the contemporary Song dynasty, which suggests that at least some of the Khitan noble women embraced the Chinese ideals of wifely decorum. Her plea to accompany her husband to the location of his exile is said to have moved the emperor's heart and that she successfully obtained his consent. The fact that this case was placed in the chapter on Women of Exemplary Conduct (*lienü chuan* 列女傳) suggests that the Khitan aristocrats considered a woman's loyalty to her husband under such a circumstance an extraordinary virtue which was not to be taken for granted. Such sacrifice was not at all expected from all highborn women, particularly princesses.

During the Northern Song dynasty, divorce occasionally was granted in order to protect the exalted status of princesses as the members of the imperial clan when their husbands were accused of misconduct or a criminal involvement.⁴⁶ Two cases cited by John Chaffee in his study arose from the presumably arrogant and unruly attitude of the princesses towards their in-laws, which became the subject of controversy among the Confucian scholars at the court, particularly the ones who advocated the importance of a

⁴⁵ LS 107:1473; Wittfogel and Feng, 265.

⁴⁶ John W. Chaffee, "The Marriage of Sung Imperial Clanswomen", 151-159.

woman's role as a subordinate wife and daughter-in-law.⁴⁷ The notorious divorce case of Princess Yanguo, a favorite daughter of the Song Renzong, for instance, began with her alleged beating of her mother-in-law and ended with her husband's receiving disgraceful demotions and a penalty of exile. Throughout Chinese history, princesses received various privileges to ensure their unparalleled status as offspring of emperor in the social hierarchy. However, what separates the Khitan princesses from their contemporary counterparts in the Song dynasty was that the former were given more freedom in their behavior because they were not under scrutiny of the literati officials and Confucian moralists. Although there was no question on the ritual superiority of the princesses over their husbands and their in-laws in the Chinese dynasties, they were to a certain degree expected to embrace the traditional ideals of a humble and obedient wife. There was in fact a growing trend in Song literati circles that disdained the privileged and extravagant lifestyle of the imperial daughters, seeing it as the source of their arrogant behavior. In the case of the Song Princess Yanguo, cited above, the emperor eventually yielded to the criticism of the officials, who sympathized with her husband. Thus Renzong allowed the restoration of the rank and office for his former son-in-law. On the other hand, he authorized the demotion of his daughter.

On the other hand, Khitan princesses were not expected to follow a certain set of well-established behavioral codes that were aimed at confining their roles as a subservient wife and daughter-in-law. Besides, the Liao bureaucrats were not given the authority to check if there were excessive abuses of privilege of the princesses and other

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 153-6. See also Zhang Bangwei, 115-116.

powerful imperial clansmen. The *Liaoshi* records an episode of loyal financial official who dared to reprimand with the princesses to respect the principles of governance. A Bohai official named Da Gongding 大公鼎 was in charge of the office of Money and Silk in Changchun Prefecture 長春州 under Daozong, when the princesses approached him to borrow money from the office. He refused their request and reminded them that government revenue was not meant to be used for personal purposes. The princesses responded with the resentful remarks but they failed to shake his determination. This episode suggests that the upright and uncompromising attitude of Da Gongding towards the powerful imperial women was considered as a rare virtue worthy of being praised.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The Liao developed their own unique institutions of determining the statuses of imperial daughters which considerably deviated from those of the Tang and the Song. Under the Liao system, daughters of an emperor and daughters of the emperor's brothers were equally entitled to receive the same statuses and privileges as gongzhu. But this does not mean that all the daughters of the imperial brothers were equal. Only the daughters of the emperor's brothers who were born by the same biological mother of the emperor were recognized as equal to the emperor's own daughters. In other words, only the sons born from the union of an emperor and an empress who came from the two prominent branches of the Xiao clan enjoyed the prerogative of passing down their superior statuses

⁴⁸ LS 105:1459-60; Wittfogel and Feng, 344.

to their daughters. This practice is consistent with the ancient Khitan inheritance and succession principles, discussed in the previous chapters, which acknowledged all sons and brothers of a tribal or confederation leader were equally recognized as heir to the position.

In addition, daughters of an emperor were further discriminated according to their mothers' ranks and ethnic origins. In general, daughters of an empress or a high-ranked consort from the Xiao clan were invested with the title of *gongzhu* and were married to close maternal relatives who served in key government offices. We observed that all the daughters of two powerful empresses, Empress Ruizhi and Empress Qinai, married their close consanguineous kin, such as their mothers' brothers and matrilineal cousins. Because the daughters of these princesses were married back to the imperial clan, a very repetitive and intricately interrelated kinship arose over the course of a few generations. Throughout their lives the daughters of empresses enjoyed various privileges and generous gifts granted by their parents. Some of them even received administrative territories within which they were authorized to rule almost autonomously. On the other hand, imperial daughters born by an emperor's minor consorts of Khitan or non-Khitan origins generally received less prestigious titles of *junzhu* or *xianzhu*. The pool from which their husbands were recruited was also wider and was comprised of Khitan noblemen and officials of Chinese or Bohai heritage. Divorces and remarriages were not uncommon among Liao princesses. This is not surprising, however, because even in the native Chinese dynasties like the Tang and the Song divorces of princesses not infrequently occurred. This phenomenon can be explained partially by the fact that

princesses' superior statuses as offspring of emperors over those of their husbands and their in-laws often became a potential source of tensions and conflicts in their marital families.

The Liao institution of recognizing the social status of an imperial consort as a significant factor in determining that of her offspring of both genders was devised to serve the interest of the imperial consort clan, the Xiao, by protecting their claim as the sole wife-givers to Liao emperors. In other words, the institution allowed only the sons of imperial consorts from the Xiao clan as legitimate heirs to the throne meanwhile princesses born by the Xiao wives of emperors were married to Xiao clansmen to produce again empresses and consorts for the Yelü men of later generations. This pattern of reciprocal and repeated marriage ensured the complete and permanent access to power of the Xiao clansmen at the Liao court and successfully prevented other clans from encroaching upon their prerogatives.

CHAPTER 6: WOMEN AS TRANSMITTERS OF THE TRIBAL TRADITIONS AND RITUALS

Introduction

The Khitan empresses and female aristocrats not only participated in important ceremonies but also performed significant roles in them. It is not so unusual for females to take part in certain ceremonies in native Chinese dynasties. For instance, Chinese empresses were responsible of performing a symbolic ritual of caring for silkworms to inaugurate an agricultural season annually. However, only titled ladies and eunuchs were allowed to participate in and observe the ceremony. Male officials were excluded.¹ The Khitan empresses were granted a special and conspicuous place in crucial ceremonies honoring their sacred mountain, Heaven and Earth and their original ancestors.

Besides empresses, other females were actively involved in the Liao imperial weddings and annual festivities. Some of them were shamans who also played indispensable roles offering incantations and sacrifices to call for rain and bring curses on their enemies prior to military engagements. Although no sources explicitly discuss social status of the shamans, there is little doubt that it was high. General public and even the emperors greatly revered and feared the power that, they believed, the shamans possessed. Evelyn Rawski noted “positive power” wielded by Korean and Manchu

¹ Wittfogel and Feng, 202 n. 162. Separation males and females in rituals is based upon the Chinese cosmological ideas of Yin and Yang. The harmony between these two energies was considered absolutely crucial to the normal cycle of the natural order. Male officials were excluded from the rituals performed by empresses and female attendants so that their yang energy would not disturb the yin activities. See Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, 27-29; Chia-lin Pao, “Yin-yang xueshuo yu funü diwei”, *Hanxue yanjiu* 5(1987): 501-12.

women in the ritual sphere. The Khitan women's roles in the tribal rituals were analogous to those of their counterparts in the Korean peninsula and in Qing China a few centuries later.² The Khitan women owed their high ceremonial status to their myths of origin and tribal religious beliefs in which the Khitan ancestress held an equal and independent place with the ancestor. For this reason, the investigation of the Khitan cosmology is prerequisite in understanding women's roles in the rituals. It will be followed by the descriptions of various religious and secular ceremonies that empresses and other female functionaries performed.

The Khitan Legend of their Origin

According to the *Liaoshi*, the Khitan believed their ancestral homeland was located at Muye Mountain (木葉山), where two rivers, Tu River (modern Laoha River) and Huang River (Shira Muren River), respectively, met.³ Their tribal legend has it that the original ancestor was a divine man (*shenren* 神人) on a white horse who was floating on the Tu River from Mayu Mountain (馬盂山) to the east. Meanwhile, a heavenly maiden (*tiannü* 天女), driving a cart pulled by a blue ox, was also floating down on the Huang River from the plains of Songlin(松林). When the courses of these two rivers were joined at Muye Mountain, the divine man and the maiden met each other and became husband and wife. They bore eight sons whose descendants gradually flourished and established the eight Khitan tribes. The *Liaoshi* also explains that the maiden on a blue

² Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 129.

³ LS 37:445-6; Wittfogel and Feng, 272.

ox was incarnation of Earth Goddess whom the Khitan worshipped. Empress Chunqin is said to have seen her riding on an ox-drawn cart when she went to the spot where two rivers meet.⁴ During the Liao imperial wedding, an old woman was selected to be seated in the position of honor and received obeisance from the members of the imperial and consort clans. It has been suggested that this old woman represented the earliest ancestress and the goddess of earth. We will return to this subject later.⁵

The *Liaoshi* describes that two shrines honoring the earliest Khitan khagan, Qishou 奇首, and his wife, along with statues of the original ancestor, ancestress and their sons, were erected on Muye Mountain.⁶ It is noteworthy that the wife of Qishou Khaghan was worshipped in a separate shrine instead of being honored together with her husband in his shrine. The Khitan emperors and empresses paid homage to their ancestors on the mountain seasonally and before military engagements by sacrificing a white horse and a blue ox to demonstrate that they were aware of and attached to their roots.⁷ As it was manifested in the legend, the Khitan considered blue and white as auspicious and sacred colors. The Liao emperors were dressed in white gowns wearing a golden crown on the head when they performed sacrificial rituals at Muye Mountain.⁸ It is likely that they impersonated the divine ancestor in the tribal legend. On the other hand, blue appears to have been mostly identified with the female descendants of the

⁴ Wittfogel and Feng, 256; LS 71:1199.

⁵ The *Liaoshi* states that the Khitans called this old woman *ao* without offering any explanations on its meaning. See LS 116:1539. For the Liao imperial wedding ceremony, see LS 52:863-4; Wittfogel and Feng, 275-7.

⁶ LS 37:445; Wittfogel and Feng, 201-2.

⁷ Wittfogel and Feng, 201-2.

⁸ LS 56:905-6; Wittfogel and Feng, 272-3.

original ancestress or Earth Goddess. For instance, the Khitan princesses are said to have received two carriages, driven by camels, covered with blue felt and decorated with dragon-head patterns on their wedding day.⁹

Otagi Matsuo believed that the legend of origin signifies the event of two proto-Khitan groups, each of whom had totemic symbols of a white horse and a dark ox, merging to form the ancient eight Khitan tribes.¹⁰ He based his argument mainly on his linguistic analysis of the names of the imperial and consort clans by pointing out the similarities between the modern Mongol word for a horse, *jalā-t*, and the ancient pronunciation of Yelü, *ia ljiuěta*. The old name for the Khitan consort clan, Shenmi probably pronounced as *šiem-miět* at the time, is almost identical with the Mongol word for a cow or ox, *sār-mut*. Therefore, he concluded that the ancestors of the Yelü clan must have led one of the proto-Khitan groups whose totem was a white horse. The ancestors of the Xiao clan must have belonged to the other group revering oxen. His argument is convincing but remains speculative because of lack of textual evidence.

The Khitan traditional Ceremonies

As we discussed above, Muye Mountain was situated at the center of the Khitan ceremonial orbit, on which the Liao emperors and couriers worshipped not only the spirits of their dead ancestors but also Heaven and Earth according to the seasonal ritual

⁹ LS 52:864-5; Wittfogel and Feng, 277.

¹⁰ Otagi Matsuo, *Kittan kodaishi no kenkyū*, Tōyōshi kenkyū sōkan no. 6, (Tokyo: Tōyōshi kenkyūkai, 1959), 104-112.

calendar. The sacrifice at Muye Mountain is described in the chapter titled “auspicious ceremonies” in the *Liaoshi*, which will be translated as follows.¹¹

“The tablets of the deities of Heaven and Earth were established on Muye Mountain facing east. At the center, a “master” tree was erected while a group of trees were planted in front of it, resembling the arrangement of the imperial court. Two trees were also planted to function as “divine gate”. As the emperor and empress arrived, *yilibi* prepared the ceremonies. A yellow-white colored horse, a dark ox and a reddish-white sheep, all males, were selected to be used for sacrifice. An official titled *yila* slaughtered the animals, cut them into pieces, and hung them on the master tree. The chief shaman splashed wine on the animals. The emperor was dressed in a white silk gown with a belt decorated with hanging gold ornaments in the shapes of fish and mountain and a jade dagger. He wore a gold crown on the head and dark silk boots. The empress was dressed in embroidered red silk garments decorated with hanging jade pieces. She wore a hood on the head and a pair of embroidered boots. Both of them proceeded, riding on saddled horses. They were followed by the courtiers in the south and the distinguished ladies (*mingfu* 命婦) in the north, each of whom was dressed in the color of the banner of the tribe to which he/she belonged. Upon reaching the master tree, the emperor and empress dismounted and climbed up the platform in the south where they seated themselves on a cushion. The courtiers and the ladies were divided and entered the place by the order of their ranks. Then they collectively offered obeisance and went to their designated places.

The emperor and empress approached the tablets of Heaven and Earth and offered wine, which was followed by the prayers read by the commissioners of court ceremonies. Then the emperor and empress resumed their places. Northern Chancellor and [tribal officials titled] *tiyin*, according to their ranks, offered libations to the master tree and other trees. Music was played. The courtiers and the ladies retired. The emperor led the members of three Patriarchal Tents (Households) and went around the “divine gate” three times. Other lineages circled it seven times. The emperor and empress ascended the platform again and sat on a dragon-patterned square cushion. At the second announcement, they proceeded to the place where East was worshipped. The courtiers and the ladies

¹¹ LS 49:834-835. This translation was largely based on a version given in Wittfogel and Feng, 272-3. Some modifications were made by this author.

followed them and organized themselves in groups as earlier. A shaman put on a white gown, while the *tiyin* put on a white cap after paying homage to it. The shaman spoke three times. Each time the emperor and empress bowed once and the entire company followed it. The emperor and empress held two cups of wine and two dishes of meat each. They offered the libations twice. Each of the courtiers and the titled ladies, while standing in the back, was also holding a cup of wine in the right hand and a meat dish in the left and made one offering. The *tiyin* was ordered to throw offerings to the direction of east. The emperor and empress made obeisance six times.

As we can see above, the ceremonial worship of Heaven and Earth was strictly tribal affair. The officials who were in charge of the ritual from preparation to the execution all held the old tribal titles not the ones borrowed from the Chinese administrative system. The emperor and empress were attending the ceremony riding on their horses under the supervision of the head shaman. It is also noteworthy that the female nobles with the titles were sharing with the male courtiers the important roles of offering food and wine sacrifices. In addition to the seasonal sacrifices, Heaven and Earth were also worshipped and notified of the important domestic affairs, such as the accession of a new ruler, occurrences and successful resolutions of internal crises and prior to mobilization of the Khitan armies. Ever since Taizu performed sacrifices to Heaven and Earth to proclaim his accession in 907, all the subsequent Khitan emperors followed his example and did the same. Taizu worshipped Heaven on eleven different occasions. Two of them were performed immediately after he successfully pacified the revolts plotted by his younger brothers. Before he pardoned his brothers, he went up to the top of Muye Mountain with his brothers to offer animal sacrifices in their place and

made an oath to Heaven and Earth.¹² No emperors revered Heaven and Earth as many times as Shengzong did. Throughout his long reign, he performed sacrifices on twenty-five occasions. This was possibly due to the numerous military engagements during his reign, including the war with the Song.

A Song envoy named Song Shou 宋綬, who visited the Liao court in 1020, confirmed that the Khitans revered Muye Mountain with utmost awe. He was told that Liao Taizu was interred there.¹³ However, the annals in the *Liaoshi* describe that the rituals took place on other mountains or even outside of the Liao territory when the emperor was engaged in the foreign military expeditions. Occasionally, the emperors visited mountains located near their hunting sites to offer sacrifices to Heaven with the animals that they captured.¹⁴ The Khitan revered all mountains for they believed that they were endowed with supernatural powers. Because mountains stood on elevated ground, they were considered closer to the gods and spirits dwelling in Heaven than men were. This explains why mountains and tall trees were essential medium used by shamans during the worship of heaven and ancestral spirits in many different societies throughout the world since the dawn of civilization.¹⁵ In addition, animal sacrifices constituted essential part of the worship. Black oxen and white horses were most preferred due to their obvious connections to the Khitan myth of origin. However, they

¹² LS 1:5 and 7; Wittfogel and Feng, 240.

¹³ See Song Shou's account on the Khitan customs in *Xu zhizhi tongjian changbian* (XZTC) 97:2253-4. Also see Ge Huayan, "Qidanzu de jitian, shangzuo yu jidong kaolue", *Beifang wenwu* 2(1999):70-6, esp. 70-2. Ge points out that the Xianbei of the Northern Wei performed very similar ceremonies of worshipping Heaven.

¹⁴ For example, Muzong and Jingzong frequently went on hunting trips and visited various mountains where they offered sacrifices to Heaven. See LS 6:70-71; LS 9:100, 103.

¹⁵ Ge Huayan, "Qidanzu de jitian", 70-2.

were often substituted with sheep of the same colors. Various wild animals captured during the imperial hunting excursions were also offered to Heaven and Earth. The *Liaoshi* lists deer, wild geese, and hares.¹⁶ Because the Khitan revered the colors of black and white, animals of those colors were particularly favored as sacrificial objects. Dark wine and dried meats were also frequently presented to the spirits and the gods. After the reign of Shengzong, animal sacrifices in court rituals and imperial funerals were restricted or forbidden by the imperial decrees issued on several different occasions. The *Liaoshi* references of the use of the animals on such events dramatically decreased as a result. Xingzong paid homage to Heaven and Earth only four times during his twenty-four year reign and no animals sacrifices are said to have occurred for the rituals. His successor, Daozong went even farther by performing this ritual only once. Compared to the earlier reigns, this is surprisingly low number. Feng Chia-sheng attributed the wide spread of Buddhism among the Khitan aristocrats during the late Liao period as the major reason for such decline of the tribal rituals.¹⁷

The ceremony performed by the Khitan emperor to announce his accession to Heaven was called Firewood and Jade Tablet Ceremony (*chaiceyi* 柴冊儀) in the *Liaoshi*, which appears to have been the second most important ritual in the court. It was thus called because a high pile of firewood (*chai* 柴) was placed in the courtyard of the ceremony hall and the courtiers participating in the ritual were given jade tablets (*ce* 冊).

¹⁶ A black hare was used on one occasion during the reign of Muzong. See LS 7:82.

¹⁷ Feng Chia-sheng, "Qidan sitian zhi su yu qi zongjiao shenhua fengsuzhi guanxi", *Shixue nianbao* 1(1932), reprinted in *Liaoshi huibian*, Vol. 8, ed. Yang Jialuo (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1973), 45-57, esp. 49-50.

When the ceremony was completed, the firewood was burned.¹⁸ The *Liaoshi* gives credit to Zuwu Khaghan from the Yaolian clan for initiating both Firewood ceremony and Rebirth ceremony, which will be discussed below. The formula of Firewood Ceremony is described in the *Liaoshi* as follows.¹⁹

An auspicious day was selected (for the ceremony). A hall and a platform were established prior to the date. In order to construct the platform, the firewood was piled up high and it was arranged to form a three leveled platform on top of which an altar was placed. (The platform) floor was covered with a hundred feet long carpet and dragon-pattered cushions. A house where the emperor's mother was supposed to look for (the emperor) during the Rebirth Ceremony was also established. The emperor entered the Rebirth building and performed the Rebirth ceremony. When it was completed, the elders from the eight tribes surrounded and protected the emperor completely from all directions and led him to the northeastern corner of the investiture hall. After making obeisance to the sun, he mounted on a horse. The oldest man in the imperial consort clan was selected as the emperor's groom. The emperor galloped vigorously then fell down. The groom and the courtiers covered him with a felt blanket.²⁰ When the emperor arrived at an elevated ground the leaders of various tribes arranged the ceremonial tools and made obeisance to the emperor from a distance. The emperor had his message to be delivered (to the tribal leaders) saying, "After the late emperor passed away, (my) uncles and elder brothers remain, among whom the virtuous should be selected (as successor). I am not a man of virtue so how can it be even considered?" The courtier replied, "Your subjects are indebted to the late emperor's generous grace and your majesty's profound virtue and will serve your majesty with all our hearts. How can there be other thoughts?" The emperor proclaimed, "I have to follow your wish and will be clear on punishment and reward. Those of you who are meritorious will be given a promotion and the appointment to office. Those who are guilty will be

¹⁸ LS 116:1536.

¹⁹ LS 49:836. I borrowed the translation of the *Liaoshi* paragraph done by Karl Wittfogel with some minor modifications. For the original version, see Wittfogel and Feng, 274-5.

²⁰ Karl Wittfogel suggested that this was possibly originated from an old Turkish practice. When a new khaghan ascended the throne, the Türks performed a ceremony, during which the new khaghan was wrapped in a felt blanket and turned around nine times. This was followed by a ritual of the courtiers choking the new khaghan until he felt dizzy. Then he was asked by the courtiers how long he would rule. See Wittfogel and Feng, 274, n. 189.

demoted and dismissed. When you follow my orders, you have to execute them in a truthful manner.”.....The place which was to be recognized later by the emperor was marked with a mound of earth and stone piles.....He made obeisance to the former emperors and arranged a feast for the courtiers.

On the following day, the emperor came out from the Investiture Hall and climbed up the platform under the escort of Grand Marshal (of the imperial guards). The ancestral tablets from the seven shrines were placed on the dragon-patterned square cushions. The courtiers led by Northern and Southern Prime Ministers stood in a circle around (the tablets), each of whom was holding the edge of the carpet, reciting eulogies. The chancellor entered carrying an imperial jade seal and a jade tablet of investiture. An official read from the jade tablet, which was followed by the chancellor's proclamation of the honorific title (of the emperor) and offering of the tablet to him. The courtiers shouted collectively “Ten thousand years” three times and made obeisance to the emperor. The Prime Ministers, the kings of Northern and Southern Divisions and the tribal leaders each presented a flock of sheep of white and yellowish colors. The emperor then changed his outfit and made obeisance to the images of the previous emperors. Subsequently the banquet was held for the courtiers each of whom received a gift in accordance of his rank and title.

This *Liaoshi* account is supplemented by *Yanbeilu* 燕北錄, authored by a Song scholar named Wang Yi 王易, which describes another set of rites that immediately followed the Investiture ceremony of Daozong in 1058.²¹

“On the twenty-third date of the tenth month in the fourth year of Qingning (1058), the barbarian emperor and his courtiers left Xuedian and headed for a place about two hundred seventy *li* away to the northwest. The place was called Yongxingdian where the Firewood Investiture Ceremony was to be performed. On the first day of the eleventh month, (the emperor) entered first a small forbidden enclosure and stayed inside overnight. On the second day, nine men, who had the similar size and height with the emperor, were first chosen among the officials. Each of

²¹ See *Yanbeilu* in *Shuo fu*, ed. Tao Zongyi, (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1963), 38:647-8. This translation was also borrowed from Wittfogel and Feng, 274, n. 188. Some modifications were added by this author.

them was bestowed with a garment worn by the emperor. They were secretly ordered to disguise themselves as the emperor, which was not to be revealed to anyone else. At midnight that night, ten men, including the emperor, came out from the small forbidden enclosure together and entered the large forbidden enclosure. Then they were divided so that each went into a tent, in which only a candle and a pair of chairs were placed. In the morning of the third day a tribal leader (*daren* 大人) was placed in front of each tent, who went into the tent to identify the emperor. The one who recognized him correctly was granted a prize of a thousand each of oxen, sheep, camel and horses. On this day, the Prince of Song (the emperor's brother) recognized the emperor in the eighth tent. Following the custom, the emperor had to speak, "I am not the emperor", to which the prince replied, "You are the emperor". They exchanged these words three times in the Khitan tongue until the emperor finally said, "It is correct". Then the emperor came out from the tent and put on a Khitan costume that he took out from a chest. Afterwards, he performed the rites in accordance with the order. First he made obeisance to the sun four times and he bowed again towards the seven ancestral halls, the god of Muye Mountain, the god of Metal, his mother (the empress dowager), the Red Woman (*chiniangzi* 赤娘子) and the members of the lineages of the seven ancestors. Then he climbed up the platform to receive the investiture. When the ceremony of the day was over, the emperor, along with the empress dowager and his paternal uncle, came out from the Large Forbidden Enclosure and went into the Small Forbidden Enclosure, where he feasted with the officials late into the night. Then he retired. On the fourth day he rested. On the fifth day, he returned to Xuedian to accept gifts from the Southern Court (the Song). The Small Forbidden Closure as located outside the northwestern corner of the Large Forbidden Closure and had two or three felt tents. The Large Forbidden Closure was a hundred and ten paces long each side, within which ten tents and seven black military tents were set up. Outside of the two enclosures, ten thousand armored soldiers were placed, each of whom was equipped with weapons such as lances, swords, bows and banners and drums. On the banners, the word "army" was written in the Khitan script.

These rites, dubbed by Karl Wittfogel as "recognition ceremony", are not described in the *Liaoshi*. Chen Shu pointed out that the Tuoba-Xianbei emperors of the Northern Wei performed a similar ceremony upon their accession. The new emperor lay on the ground with seven men covered with black blankets until he was recognized by the

courtier and proclaimed formally.²² He also suggested that the Khitan Firewood Investiture Ceremony was the remnant of the triennial gathering of the tribal council held to elect a new khaghan during the pre-dynastic era. Since Taizu “burned the firewood” to proclaim his accession to Heaven, all the subsequent Liao emperors, except Muzong, performed the ceremony the total of thirteen times. Although the Firewood ceremony is said to have been preceded by the Rebirth ceremony, not all the emperors performed the two ceremonies back to back as it was prescribed in the *Liaoshi*. In reality, the Firewood ceremony was rarely performed upon the accession, despite what the title of the ceremony suggests. Shizong, for instance, delayed the ritual for five months while he was waiting for the official approval from his grandmother, Empress Dowager Chunqin. Upon receiving her approval, he immediately ordered her to be exiled outside of the capital. Only then he felt that he was ready to announce his accession to the Heaven and Earth by performing the Firewood Ceremony.²³ Shengzong performed his investiture ceremony in the twenty-seventh year of his reign in 1009, some forty days before his formidable mother, Empress Dowager Ruizhi, passed away. In other words, only after the regency of his mother practically ended, he took over the reins of the government from her and that was when he was entitled to demonstrate his authority as a ruler by fulfilling his ritual obligations.²⁴

²² When Emperor Xiaowu was enthroned in 532, this ceremony took place in the eastern outskirt of the capital. After he was identified, he made obeisance to Heaven on the black rug facing the west. See Chen Shu, “Lun Qindan zhi xuanhan dahui yu diwei jicheng”, 422; Wittfogel and Feng, 275, n.190.

²³ LS 5:63-4.

²⁴ Feng Chia-sheng, “Qidan sitianzhi su”, 47-8; LS 14:164.

Among the participants of the Firewood Investiture Ceremony, the role of a certain Red Woman who received an obeisance from the new emperor is intriguing. The Red Woman was the Chinese translation for the Khitan original title, *luehuao* 掠胡奥. Although not much information is provided in the *Liaoshi*, it is clear that she represented the original divine ancestress of the Khitan people who floated down the Huang River on an ox-driven cart.²⁵ In addition to the Firewood ceremony, *luehuao*, also known as its abbreviated form, *ao* 奥, played an important role in the imperial wedding banquet. It is said that a woman who received most respect and admiration was to be chosen to be seated in the position of honor.²⁶ We will return to the discussion of the imperial wedding below.

Mothers of the emperors and the female ritual functionaries were also indispensable in the Rebirth Ceremony (*zaishengyi* 再生儀). As the name suggests, the purpose of the ceremony was to simulate the moment of birth. The Khitan tradition dictated that the ceremony be held in the winter of every twelfth year from the reigning emperor's birth year. This corresponded with the end of a twelve-year cycle marked by twelve respective animals according to the Chinese calendar. It was the prerogative of the emperors to perform this ritual. However, on rare occasions, the empress-dowagers, heirs-apparent, as well as *yilijin* (tribal chieftains) are said to have received the privilege to take charge of it.²⁷ The description of the ceremony in the *Liaoshi* reads as follows.²⁸

²⁵ See Wittfogel and Feng: 275, n. 191; LS 116:1539; LS 52:863-4.

²⁶ Princess Zhigu, Taizu's daughter, is said to have been elected to serve as *ao* when she was in her youth. See LS 65:999-1000.

²⁷ LS 116:1537.

“An auspicious day was selected (for the ceremony) once every twelve years. It was to be held in one of the winter months in the previous year of the emperor’s birth year (according to the cycle of Chinese calendar). Prior to the event, the area north of the Forbidden Gate was cleared so that two buildings, one for Rebirth and the other for the emperor’s mother, were set up on the ground. A chariot that carried the tablets of the previous emperors was also placed there. In the southeast corner of the Rebirth Building, a three-branched tree was secured on the ground upside down. On the day of the ceremony, a boy and an old midwife were placed inside of the building. A (married) woman holding wine and an elderly man carrying a quiver stood outside of the building. An official begged the spirits of the deceased emperors to descend from the chariot and offered libations. When it was completed, the emperor left his sleeping room and approached the Rebirth Building. The officials respectfully welcomed him with making obeisance twice. The emperor entered the building and removed his clothes and shoes. Followed by the young boy, he passed under the tree with branches three times. Each time he passed by, the midwife uttered some words and stroked his body. Then the boy passed by the tree seven times. When the emperor lay down next to the tree, the old man spoke out, striking the quiver, “A boy is born.” The Chief Shaman covered the emperor’s head. When the emperor arose, the officials congratulated him and made obeisance to him twice. The old midwife took the wine from the woman who carried it (into the building) and offered it (to the emperor). The Chief Shaman upheld the cloth in which a baby was wrapped, colorful ropes and other things, while reciting incantations. Each of seven old men who were previously selected came up a name for the emperor (written on a document) tied with colored ribbons. They all knelt down and presented to the emperor. Then the emperor selected the most auspicious name and accepted it. The gifts were bestowed to the old men. They made obeisance to the emperor twice and retired. The officials presented the emperor with the infant-wrapping clothes, colored ropes and other ritual objects. The emperor made obeisance to the images of the previous emperors and threw a feast for the officials.”

According to the annals, the Rebirth Ceremony was not always performed once every twelve years. Except the reigns of Taizu and Muzong, it is recorded that the ceremony took place at least once during the reigns of all the rest of the Liao emperors.

²⁸ The translation done by Karl Wittfogel is quoted with some modifications. The underlines were inserted by this author. See Wittfogel and Feng, 273-4; LS 53:879.

Three empresses-dowagers performed the ceremony on behalf of their imperial sons, Shengzong, Xingzong and Daozong, respectively. Daozong had his eldest son, Jun, go through the ritual in 1070 when the latter was heir apparent.²⁹ Seven years later, Jun was killed as a result of political struggles at the court instigated by a notorious official named Yelü Yixin. Then Jun's son, Yanxi (later known as Tianzuo Emperor), was named heir apparent and was ordered to perform the same ceremony twice in 1086 and 1098.³⁰

There was only one case recorded in the *Liaoshi* in which a powerful high-ranking official was granted with a special permission to perform the Rebirth ceremony in 989 during the regency of Shengzong's mother, Empress Dowager Ruizhi. He was Yelü Xiuge (d. 998), then the Grand Commander-in-Chief of the Khitan military.³¹ No *yilijins* are said to have undergone the ritual procedure during the dynastic period. The only *Liaoshi* reference of the rite in relevance to the accession of new *yilijins* can be found in the biography of one of Taizu's uncles named Xiadi, a few years before the establishment of the dynasty. Xiadi is said to have disguised himself as his older brother, Yanguzhi, then *yilijin* of the Yila tribe, by stealing the latter's clothes during the Rebirth Ceremony and quickly proclaimed himself as new *yilijin*.³²

It has been suggested that the Rebirth Ceremony originally functioned as the kind of a ritual substitute of the killing of the previous rulers when the change of leadership

²⁹ Shunzong was the posthumous title of Prince Jun. He was the eldest son of Daozong and Empress Xuanyi. Both the empress and Prince Jun became victims of the malicious slander of their political rival, Yelü Yixin, then Northern Chancellor. Empress Xuanyi was forced to commit suicide and Prince Jun was murdered by Yelü Yixin. See the official biography of Prince Jun in LS 72:1215-6.

³⁰ LS 24:292; LS 26:311.

³¹ LS 12:134; LS 83:1299-1301.

³² See Xiadi's biography in LS 112:1498.

occurred at both tribal and confederation levels.³³ Pre-dynastic Khitan leadership was often transferred on pre-mortem basis. When the new leader was elected, the life of the ousted one was spared and he was expected to yield the position without showing any remorse.³⁴ Then the ceremonies of Rebirth and Firewood were performed by the new leader to signal the beginning of the new leadership. During the dynastic era, the Liao emperors underwent the Rebirth Ceremony because they believed that it would rejuvenate and empower their body and mind by re-living the magical moment of birth. During the reign of Shengzong, the ceremony was performed as many as five times.³⁵ Interestingly, his regent mother, Empress Dowager Ruizhi, played the leading role on behalf of her son on three out of five of the ceremonial occasions within three years from 984 to 986.³⁶ The latter two ceremonies were held only a month apart from each other in the year 986, which were preceded a few months by the Liao army's victory in the battle against the Song. It is possible that the empress dowager celebrated the event by going through the national ritual, during which she paid respect to the gods by prostrating and asked for good fortune in the future. Xingzong's mother, Empress Dowager Qinai, also followed the examples of her mother-in-law, Empress Ruizhi, in performing the sacred ritual twice in 1039 and in 1051, both of which coincided with the twelfth year of the emperor's birth year.³⁷ Empress Renyi fulfilled the ritual obligation on behalf of her son,

³³ Lin Ruihan, "Qidan minzude zaishengli", *Dalu zazhi* 4:2.

³⁴ XWDS 72:886.

³⁵ Shengzong personally performed the ritual twice in 983 and in 994. See LS 10:111; LS 13:144.

³⁶ LS 10:111; LS 11:142; LS 11:143.

³⁷ LS 18:222; LS 20:243.

Daozong, in 1063.³⁸ The Rebirth Ceremony was generally accompanied by the declaration of an amnesty.

The rites relating to the actual birth of the imperial offspring is not described in the *Liaoshi* but Wang Yi wrote down his observation of an imperial birth in Yanbeilu, cited above for the “recognition rites”. The Khitan empress is said to have made obeisance to the sun eight times before she entered the tent to give a birth. The tent was specially situated in a way that it was surrounded by forty-eight smaller tents, each of which contained a sheep with big horns inside. As the empress went into the labor and her pain intensified, men shouted while twisting the horns of the sheep to induce loud noises. The Khitan believed that such noises alleviated the pain of the empress in labor. If a boy was born, the empress ate a curd with almond oil and the emperor put on a red garment. Khitan music was played to celebrate. If a girl was born, she had some black poultice soup with salt and her husband wore a black garment. Then Chinese music was played. The wounded sheep were left to die naturally instead of being slaughtered on the spot. The empress returned to the emperor’s palace on the ninth day.³⁹

In addition to the Rebirth Ceremony, *ao* woman played a central role in the ceremonies of secular nature such as in the imperial weddings. Besides the *ao* woman, several ladies from the two aristocratic clans were employed in the various stages of the wedding of emperor, according to the *Liaoshi* description.⁴⁰ Except the empress’ sisters, it specified that all of the ladies participating in the ritual had to be married women. One

³⁸ LS 22:262.

³⁹ Wittfogel and Feng, 266, n. 118; *Yanbeilu* in *Shuo fu* 38: 648.

⁴⁰ LS 52:863-4. Here I again borrowed the translation of Karl Wittfogel with some modifications. See Wittfogel and Feng, 275-7.

particular lady assumed the important role of transferring her powerful fertility to the new bride.

The ceremony of the emperor receiving his empress: An auspicious day was selected. Upon the arrival of the day, the entire clan of the empress gathered. In the early morning she left her chamber and was seated in a hall. The emperor dispatched the messengers and the go-between with animals (for sacrifice), wine and food to the house of the empress....After a moment, they made obeisance and presented wine first to the empress, then to her parents, her clansmen and her brothers....The betrothal gifts were received by the clan of the empress with some (congratulatory) words, then they made obeisance again until they all seated themselves. The wife of tiyin invited the empress to get into the carriage, after making obeisance to her four times. The empress also made obeisance four times each to her parents, her paternal uncles and their wives, her elder brothers and twice to the elders of the clan. The she departed. When she got on the carriage, her parents offered her some wine and admonition (on marriage)....Musicians blocked the road, offering their congratulatory sayings, and the empress ordered them to be granted with gifts. Her clansmen chased after (her carriage) offering obeisance and wine and she continued her journey. Just before the carriage arrived at the palace gate, the prime ministers handed down the imperial order that wine be offered to the empress and all her escorts. When the carriage arrived, the tiyin led the entire imperial clansmen to greet the bride by making obeisance twice. The carriage stopped at about seventy paces southeast from the private hall. The *tiyin's* wife begged the bride to descend from the carriage. The empress was carrying a silver jar on her back and a warp-spacing tool in her hand. She walked on the path covered with yellow fabric. A man was following behind her holding lambskin clothes wide as if to cover her. In front of her, a (married) woman was walking backward holding a mirror. The empress walked over a saddle, which was placed on the path. Then she arrived at the hall in which the tablets of the imperial ancestors were placed. She made obeisance three times (to the ancestral tablets). Then she bowed to the south and the north once each....She offered obeisance and wine to the images of her parents-in-law. She also made obeisance to a woman who was selected from the imperial clan for producing numerous offspring and offered her the jar and a warp-spacing tool. Then she made obeisance to the images of all the previous emperors and offered wine. The spirits (of the deceased emperors) bestowed her with garments, pearls, jade and other jeweled ornaments....The sisters of the empress took part in making obeisance and were also granted with presents. The imperial clansmen

who had greeted the empress and her clansmen who had escorted her to the palace were offered with wine and they drank it in pairs. The empress was seated in the side hall.....The go-between announced an imperial order that everyone who had escorted the empress was to be lined up in the northern part of the hall. When the emperor seated himself, a woman who was revered by others in the imperial clan was selected to sit in the position of honor (*ao*) and to direct the betrothal ceremony.....The elders of the empress' clan and her attendants made obeisance to the *ao* woman three times.....The *ao* woman and the go-between offered wine (to everyone) three rounds and ordered the empress' escorts to make obeisance twice. All sat down until the feast was over.

The following day, the emperor woke up early to make obeisance to the image of the previous emperor and presented wine. He returned to the hall and held a banquet for the clan of the empress and the courtiers. The members of the two clans drank in pairs as the day before. All sorts of entertainments took place, including wrestling and horse-riding competition, for the amusement (of those who attended the wedding). The next day, the emperor distributed gifts to the members of the empress' clan and to those who had given her farewell gifts. The gifts differed from each other....In the side hall, the emperor was presented with a list of the wardrobe of the empress. The wine was served five times and the empress' escorts bid their farewell. The imperial clan offered gifts again to the empress' clan. The empress' clan expressed their gratitude to the *ao* woman by offering her gifts. Then the ceremony was completed.

So far we investigated the ceremonies held in the Liao court which retained the unique traditions of the ancient Khitan tribes. We saw how mothers and wives of the Liao emperors were incorporated into the rituals during which they shared the leading role with their imperial sons and husbands. Some of them were not satisfied with sharing and decided to assume the role of the sole protagonists in one of the most sacred Khitan rituals, the Rebirth Ceremony. The empresses also took part in the annual ceremonial hunt called *la*, which signaled the beginning of the winter hunting season. They rode on the chariots with the emperors and offered obeisance to the sun and to the direction,

east.⁴¹ Besides the empresses, titled women from both imperial and consort clans were employed in the ceremonies as carriers of ritual paraphernalia and presenters of the objects of sacrifice.

The Khitan Tribal Beliefs and the Role of the Shamans

In addition to Heaven, Earth and Muye Mountain, the Khitan revered and feared numerous objects in nature, such as trees, wind, the sun and fire, just to name a few, which were believed to have possessed supernatural powers. They also worshipped the east among the four directions and considered the left more auspicious than the right.⁴² To the Khitan, the world was filled with all kinds of gods, spirits and ghosts who regulated the natural order and interfered with the human affairs. Climate changes were controlled by the gods of rain and wind, while the flock of animals was overseen by the deity of its own.⁴³ For this reason, various supernatural beings needed to be consulted before making important decisions in life and to be pleased at all times to prevent any misfortunes.

Needless to say, the Khitan original ancestor and ancestress were the central figures in the Khitan pantheon, surrounded by the spirits of the previous emperors and the forbears of the imperial clan. The emperors and empresses performed solemn ceremonies to appease them at the mausoleums and the shrines at Muye Mountain according to the season and on the anniversaries of their deaths. The spirits of non-

⁴¹ LS 51:845-61; Wittfogel and Feng, 284.

⁴² LS 45:711-2.

⁴³ For example, Taizong is said to have made sacrifices to the god of the herd. See LS 3:30.

imperial Khitan people are said to have resided in Black Mountain, located somewhere in the north in the Liao territory, under the care of the god of the mountain. On winter solstice every year, it was their national custom to slaughter a sheep, a horse and a wild goose, all in white color. Then they mixed the blood of the animals with libations with which the emperor worshipped the mountain from a distance. On this day, people living in five capitals made ten thousand paper figurines in the shapes of humans and horses as sacrificial offerings and burned them at the mountain. People were fearful of the mountain and dared not approach it except for the day of the annual sacrifice.⁴⁴

New History of Five Dynasties commented on the Khitan penchant for ghosts. They are said to have worshipped any objects in nature but particularly, they showed their utmost awe for the sun. It claims that the Khitan not only faced east even during the court audiences but also their buildings were oriented towards east.⁴⁵ The *Liaoshi* describes the ceremony performed by Muzong on winter solstice to worship the sun in 952.⁴⁶ When a solar eclipse occurred in 1020 during the reign of Shengzong, the emperor ordered the courtiers to pray for the return of the sun.⁴⁷ However, the Khitan did not worship the moon unlike other semi-nomads from the north such as the Xiongnu, Xianbei and the Mongols, who are said to have made sacrifices to the sun and the moon as a pair.⁴⁸ On the other hand, their reverence for fire is reminiscent of the Mongol custom of

⁴⁴ LS 53:878; Wittfogel and Feng, 271.

⁴⁵ XWDS 72:888.

⁴⁶ LS 6:71; LS 49:267; Wittfogel and Feng, 256.

⁴⁷ LS 16:187; Wittfogel and Feng, 262.

⁴⁸ The Xiongnu are said to have worshipped the rising sun in the morning and the moon in the evening. Three times a year, they gathered for a sacrificial ritual to honor the moon and the deities in the sky. Sergei I. Rudenko, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia*, 288-9.

holding water and fire with utmost respect and awe.⁴⁹ On the last day of the year, the shamans headed by the chief shaman recited incantations to summon the god of fire while sheep fat and salt were being roasted on a burning stove. It was followed by the emperor's making obeisance twice before the fire.⁵⁰ In addition to the sun and fire, deities of deer and a white horse were occasionally worshipped at the imperial court.⁵¹ The *Liaoshi* also mentions that sacrifices were made even to inanimate and man-made objects like the banners and drums with the imperial insignia, the imperial tent and carriages.⁵²

So far we observed that the Khitan court ceremonies in which the emperors played the role of the main mediator between the spirits and people. In other words, the Khitan emperor acted as the head shaman by summoning and communicating with the gods and spirits. His place was central and not substitutable as the sole ruler of men and the son of Heaven, particularly in the rituals of worshipping Heaven and the imperial ancestral spirits. However, even in those rituals the emperor relied upon the assistance rendered by a group of shamans, as described above. Not infrequently they were ordered

⁴⁹ Shimada Masao, *Ryosei no kenkyu*, (Tokyo: Nakazawa insatsu kabushiki kaisha, 1954), 579-80. The Mongol customary law prescribed a death penalty for those who committed an act of sacrilege against water or fire according to the *yassa*. It was forbidden to spit, splash water on the fire or poke at the flame with a sharp object like a knife. Even the burnt ashes were considered sacred. Those who urinated on the ashes or on the water were also subject to the death penalty. See John of Plano Carpini's account in Christopher Dawson, *Mission to Asia*, 11-14. For further information on the Mongol *yassa* see Valentin Rasianovsky, *Fundamental Principles of Mongol Law*, Uralic Altaic Series 43, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965).

⁵⁰ LS 49:838; Wittfogel and Feng, 267.

⁵¹ Taizong performed the ritual of worshipping the god of deer in 928. The god of a white horse was honored in the court of Shengzong in 998. LS 3:28; LS 14:135.

⁵² After pacifying the rebellion of his brothers in 913, Taizu recovered the stolen imperial tent and made sacrifices to it. See LS 1:7. Taizong is said to have performed the similar ritual upon his completion of the Firewood Investiture Ceremony in 940. LS 4:49. See also Shimada Masao, *Ryosei no kenkyu*, 273-276.

to take the place of the emperor and performed the rituals to Heaven, Earth, and to the gods of famous mountains and rivers.⁵³

In the Liao court, the roles of the shamans were not confined to summoning spirits and gods prior to making sacrifices to them. When an unusual phenomenon occurred, they were ordered to perform and interpret divinations. Upon receiving the report that a beehive was formed on the imperial carriage, Taizong ordered a divination to determine whether it was auspicious or not. It was turned out to be a good omen.⁵⁴ In order to assess the chances of victory of a future military engagement, a shoulder blade of a white sheep was placed on a fire made by burning mugwort and horse manure. If it cracked, the Khitan went ahead with their plan of engagement. If not, they called it off.⁵⁵ Prior to the mobilization of the troops, the shamans were authorized by the emperor to make sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, the god of Military (bingshen 兵神) and the gods of banners and drums. Jingzong is said to have ordered these rituals to be performed before launching the expedition against the Song in 980.⁵⁶ The ritual for a military expedition personally headed by the emperor is described in the *Liaoshi* as follows.⁵⁷

The ceremony was held regularly during the fall or winter. It could be taken place regardless of the season whenever they had to respond to the attacks of the enemies and to the emergencies. Before the troops were sent out for a battle, it had to be reported to the ancestral temples. Three tablets were established at this time to be sacrificed to. One was for the former emperors, the second one for the “roads” and the third for the armies. A dark ox and a white horse were slaughtered and offered to

⁵³ LS 12:134.

⁵⁴ LS 4:50.

⁵⁵ Wittfogel and Feng, 216; *Qidan guozhi* (QDGZ) 27:3b.

⁵⁶ LS 9:103.

⁵⁷ LS 51:845; Wittfogel and Feng, 286. This translation was based on that of Karl Wittfogel.

Heaven and Earth. The sacrifices were made often at the vicinity of a tree which stood alone. The emperor in armor and helmet made sacrifices to all of the deceased emperors at the mausoleums. The soldiers were examined. When the mobilization of the troops was imminent, one each of male and female deer were sacrificed to chase away the evil spirits. When they were about to face the enemy in the battle, they knotted the tails of the horses, invoked and made obeisance to Heaven and Earth before they entered (the battle). When they successfully captured a walled city and subdued the enemy, they made sacrifices to Heaven and Earth with black and white sheep. If they retreated (without achieving a complete victory), a captured male horse and an ox were offered to Heaven and Earth as sacrifices. When the army was about to charge, a prisoner condemned to death was tied to a pole planted in the ground. When the army returned from the battle, a spy was used instead of a prisoner. Towards the direction where the army was headed, they shot arrows in a chaotic fashion until the arrows were gathered on the man on the pole like a hedgehog. This was called “shooting ghost arrows”.⁵⁸

Exorcising harmful spirits was clearly marked as one of the most important events in the ceremonial calendar of the Khitan. At dawn of the first day of every year, forty nine balls were thrown outside from each tent through its window. If the number of the balls recovered was even, it was considered a good omen and people celebrated it with music, wine and feast. If the number of the balls was odd, the Khitan perceived it ominous and turned to the shamans for a remedy. Twelve shamans with bells and arrows in their hands circled around the tents ringing bells, singing and yelling, while salt was placed on the stove to be blasted. Moles were placed on the burning stoves. The Khitan referred to this ritual as “startling the evil ghosts”.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The ritual of shooting ghost arrows is said to have taken place prior to Jingzong’s southern expedition in 980, cited above. The purpose of this ritual appears to have been bringing down a curse onto their enemies. See LS 9:103. Taizong is also said to have performed the same ritual in 938 during his campaign in China. See LS 3:40.

⁵⁹ LS 53:877; Wittfogel and Feng, 268-9.

The shamans were also employed to summon rain when there was a prolonged draught. The emperors resorted to various rituals from ordering the courtiers to splash water to each other, sitting on a floating boat in a pond praying and shooting arrows at a willow tree.⁶⁰ The ceremony held at the court to pray for rain was called Sese Ceremony, which is described in the *Liaoshi*.⁶¹

If a drought occurred, an auspicious day was selected to hold Sese Ceremony to invoke rain. A canopy was installed on a hundred poles and stakes in advance. When the day arrived, the emperor offered libations to the images of the previous emperors then shot arrows at a willow tree. When the emperor shot the second time, princes and prime ministers shot once at a time. Those who successfully hit (the marks on) the tree were promised as a reward the robes and the headgear of the people who marked the tree. Those who missed the target yielded their robes and caps (to be used) as prizes. Those who lost offered wine to the winners. Afterwards, the gowns and the caps were returned to the original owners. On the following day, a willow tree was planted southeast of the canopy. The shamans made offerings of fine wine and millet to the planted tree, reciting incantation. The emperor and the empress sacrificed to the east, which was followed by the young sons and brothers (of the attendees) shooting at the tree. The members of the imperial, Imperial Maternal Uncles lineage and the courtiers who were present at the ceremony were granted gifts according to their ranks. Three days later, it rained and tribal official *diliemadu* was bestowed four horses and four robes. If the rain did not come down, water was splashed on him.

It is clear that both male and female shamans were actively employed at the Liao court. Two separate characters *wu* 巫 and *xi* 覡 were used in the *Liaoshi* to refer to

⁶⁰ Emperors Taizong, Muzong, and Daozong employed these methods described to call for rain. Draught must have been a recurring problem during the Muzong's reign. LS 3:29-30; LS 6:77; LS 7:83-4; LS 24:285. See also Wittfogel and Feng, 257 and 265.

⁶¹ LS 49:835; Wittfogel and Feng, 267. This translation was largely based on the work of Karl Wittfogel but I disagreed with his interpretation of a few words. Refer to his original translation.

female and male functionaries, respectively.⁶² Some undoubtedly wielded a profound influence on the emperors. In 957, Muzong ordered a female shaman named Xiaogu to be executed for misleading him with her false recipe for elixir of prolonging life.⁶³ She offered the emperor a prescription, which required men's gall as an essential mixing ingredient. A great number of men were killed within a few years to produce the magical medicine until the emperor finally realized that he had been deceived. First, Xiaogu was ordered to be shot with special arrows making weeping noise and to be trodden to death by horses. The meticulous method chosen for her execution seems quite extraordinary. Particularly the fact that she was shot with weeping arrows reminds us of the war ritual called "shooting ghost arrows", described above, during which a prisoner was tied to a pole and shot at with numerous arrows. It seems to betray the desire and cautiousness on the part of the emperor and the courtier to make sure that the death of the shaman was a thorough and complete one, because they still feared her power.

The biography of a noble woman, Xiao Yixin, listed in the chapter of "Women of Exemplary Conduct (*lienuchuan* 列女傳)", reveals that married women also employed the expertise of the shamans to secure the affection of their husbands by chasing away evil spirits.⁶⁴ When Xiao Yixin, daughter of a princess, propagated to her sisters-in-law

⁶² LS 12:134.

⁶³ This incident is recorded in the annals of Muzong's reign but a slightly more detailed version also appears in the chapter of the "treaties on punishments", which was translated into English by Herbert Franke. See LS 7:74; LS 61: 938; Wittfogel and Feng, 256-7. See also Herbert Franke, "The "Treaties on Punishments" in the Liao History; An Annotated Translation", *Central Asiatic Journal* 27 (1983):9-38, esp. 19.

⁶⁴ LS 107:1473; Wittfogel and Feng, 267. Yelü Yixin is said to have been daughter of Princess Hudu and Xiao Taosugan. When her husband, Yelü Nu, was falsely accused of being involved in a criminal affair, he was deprived and was sentenced an exile. She was honored for being loyal to her husband

the superiority of cultivating propriety over exorcism in captivating their husbands, she was faced with their bewilderment. Clearly, the shamans that these aristocratic ladies consulted in search for a recipe to achieve marital harmony were females.

Conclusion

The Khitan tribal tradition allowed women to take part in various tribal rituals of both secular and religious realms. We observed that the Khitan empresses worshipped their ancestors, the sacred mountains, Heaven and Earth, riding on the horses or camel-driven chariots, shoulder to shoulder with their husbands. There seems to have been a remarkable degree of equality between the roles played by the emperor and the empress in some of the rituals. Even the shrines honoring the Khitan original ancestor and ancestress were established and were offered with sacrifices separately. Such equality was deeply rooted in the Khitan myth of origin in which their divine progenitor and his female companion are insinuated to have formed an equal union by annexing their assets—two different kinds of herds, oxen and horses. Some Khitan empresses were so powerful that they assumed the role of the emperor in performing the time-honored traditional rite, the Rebirth ceremony, which was normally reserved exclusively for the supreme leader or the emperor. Although their ritual participation sounds extraordinary but maybe it was not so unique, for I encountered a case in which one of the Northern Song empress dowagers is said to have worn imperial gowns and a crown and offered sacrifices to the

because she refused to leave her husband under such circumstances, even though the emperor urged her to divorce.

Imperial Ancestral Shrine in 1033 on behalf of the emperor.⁶⁵ She was Empress Dowager Liu (969-1033), who was de facto ruler of the Song as a regent of Renzong (r. 1023-1063). The sources do not agree on the details whether she had actually fulfilled her ritual obligation to the end or she abandoned her plan to visit the shrine after facing a criticism from the ministers. This is the crucial point where the divergence between the ritual authority of the Song empresses and their Khitan lies. The incident in which Empress Liu was donned in imperial robes and communicating to the Song imperial ancestors was considered an anomaly. Her action brought on a great controversy in the court and she became the target of severe criticism of the officials and ritual experts. On the contrary to the Song case, various roles played by the Liao empresses and female religious functionaries at the Khitan court were deeply ingrained in their tribal nomadic roots and were considered natural and indispensable.

⁶⁵ John W. Chaffee, "The Rise and Regency of Empress Liu (969-1033)", 1-25, esp. 17-8.

CHAPTER 7: WOMEN'S LIVES REFLECTED IN THEIR BURIALS

Introduction

So far, we have solely relied on the written sources in our attempt to learn about various roles played by the Khitan women in both secular and spiritual realms. In this chapter, however, we will look at very different kinds of materials that became available to us since the beginning of the last century, the excavation reports of the Liao tombs. These tomb reports offer us an invaluable opportunity to expand our understanding of not only the Khitan mortuary practice but also their concepts of afterlife. I will limit my investigation mainly to the reports on the tombs that contained Khitan female occupants and attempt to reconstruct their life as much as possible based on the discoveries from their burials. In doing so, I want to address the following questions. What can we learn about the activities of the women during their lifetime from these discoveries? Can we say that their funerary artifacts reveal their ethnic and cultural identity that set them apart from their neighbors, such as the Chinese? In other words, do we see the evidence that the Khitan women's life and mortuary culture was distinctively different from that of the contemporary Chinese women living in the Liao territory or the Song? Lastly, as far as the Khitan mortuary practices are concerned, do we see the evidence that they underwent a great transformation due to the influence of the Chinese culture? I begin with a summary of the Khitan funerary customs recorded in the Chinese literature and of the brief history of the Liao archaeology, which will be followed by descriptions of general

characteristics of the Liao tomb structure, various interment methods and the funerary artifacts found with the female tomb occupants.

The Khitan Funerary Practices as described in Chinese Histories

The earliest account of the Khitan ritual of death and mourning can be found in the dynastic history (*Sui Shu*) of the Sui 隋 dynasty (581-618). It noted that the Khitan did not weep when their parents died for such behavior was considered weak and cowardly. They carried the corpse in a horse-drawn cart deep into the forest, where they placed it on a large tree branch. Three years later, they would return to the site to collect the remains and burn them. Offering libations, they prayed to the spirit of the deceased to help them catch many boars and deer when they hunted.¹ An almost identical account reappeared in much later dynastic histories such as two versions each of the Tang histories (*Tangshu* 唐書) and the histories of the Five Dynasties (*Wudaishi* 五代史). The *Tang shu* specifically pointed out that no coffins or grave mounds were used by the Khitan. They did not wear mourning clothes and observed no specific period of mourning. While parents grieved the death of their offspring, the younger generations did not mourn when their parents died.² Such accounts are reminiscent of the earlier descriptions of their nomadic predecessors from the steppes, such as Wuhuan 烏桓 and Xianbei 鮮卑. They were the dominant military force in North China during the period of disunity that

¹ Weizheng, Linghu Defen, et al. eds., *Sui shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1973), 84:1881.

² Liu Xiu, et al. eds., *Jiu Tangshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), 199:5350; Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, et al. eds., *Xin Tangshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975) 219: 6167.

followed the collapse of the Han dynasty (202 BC-AD 220) and lasted until the reunification of China by the Sui dynasty at the end of the sixth century. They are also said to have honored the young and strong while despising the old and weak. Compilers of Chinese histories believed that such characteristics were widely shared by various “barbarians” from the north.³ Unlike the Khitans, however, the Wuhuan and the Xianbei are said to have used coffins. The *Tang Histories* noted the similarity between the Khitan mortuary practices and those of the Tujue 突厥 Türks, while the *History of the Five Dynasties* equated them to those of the Xi 奚 and Mohe 靺鞨 tribes to the east of the Khitan.⁴

After the establishment of the Chinese-style state in the beginning of the tenth century, the Khitan mortuary tradition appears to have undergone a dramatic transformation, at least for the ruling class. According to their dynastic history, the *Liaoshi* 遼史, solemn and elaborate funerary ceremonies were performed at the court for the deceased emperors prior to the interment into the final resting place. Its description particularly concerns the final stages of the funerals for two emperors, Shengzong 聖宗 (r. 983-1031) and his grandson, Daozong 道宗 (r. 1055-1101). Multiple ceremonies were held at the imperial funeral hall for six months following the death of Shengzong before his corpse was transported to the burial site. It does not provide specific information on

³ For the customs of the Wuhuan, see Fan Ye, comp., *Hou Han Shu* (Beijing:Zhonghua shuju, 1965) 90: 2979-2980. See also Albert Dien, “A New Look at the Xianbei and their Impact on Chinese Culture”, *Ancient Mortuary Traditions of China*, ed. George Kuwayama (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 40-59, particularly 43.

⁴ See Ouyang Xiu, *Xin wudaishi* (XWDS) 72:886.

how the body was preserved for such a long time, especially through the hot summer months, for the emperor died in the beginning of the sixth month and was finally buried at the end of the eleventh month.⁵ The annals in the *Liaoshi* suggest that long lapses between the deaths and the actual interment were normal in the Liao dynasty. The lengths of the lapses vary greatly from three months to as long as thirteen months. When the dynastic founder, Taizu, died in the sixth month of 926, the actual interment took place in the eighth month in the following year.⁶ It is a rational speculation, therefore, that some kind of embalment must have been employed in order to preserve the corpse to endure such a long delay of interment. On this particular subject, we can turn to various histories including *History of Five Dynasties* and essays written by contemporary Song 宋 (960-1279) observers, which describe how the body of the second Liao emperor, Taizong (r. 926-947), was treated when the latter suddenly died in a Chinese town called Biancheng on his way back to the Liao capital from his campaign against the Later Jin 後晉 (936-947). It is said that the stomach of the deceased emperor was cut open and the intestines were removed. Afterwards it was stuffed with salt and resealed in order to deter its decomposition while it was being carried back to the Liao capital. The Chinese who observed the process referred to the corpse as “imperial dried meat” with a condescending nuance.⁷

⁵ LS 50: 839-40; LS 17:206-7; LS 18:213.

⁶ See Wittfogel and Feng, 280 n.215; LS 2:23-4. The people of the Koguryo Kingdom are said to have kept their dead in the house for three years before they buried them. See Li Yanshou, *Bei shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 94:3124-5.

⁷ Xue Juzheng, *Jiu wudaishi* (JWDS) 137:1836; XWDS 72:899. A brief summary of this passage is provided in Wittfogel and Feng, 280.

When a Khitan envoy to the Song court named Yelü Di fell ill and died in Hua Prefecture (in modern Henan Province) on his return journey to his country in 1092, the Chinese couriers observed his corpse hung upside down in order to drain the bodily fluid. To facilitate the process, the skin was poked with the sharp end of writing brushes⁸ Then alum was applied to the corpse to shrink it. It is said that only the bones were left and transported back to home when the process was completed. The Chinese were also told that such method of embalming was reserved for the nobles. People of lower origins preferred much less complicated method of burning the bodies of the dead. The most thorough description on the subject comes from *Luting sishi* 虜廷事實, written by Wen Weijin 文惟簡, a scholar who lived under the Jurchen-Jin 金 dynasty (1115-1234) shortly after the fall of the Liao dynasty.⁹

According to him, Khitan funerary practices diverged considerably from those of their neighbors, the Jurchen and the northern Chinese. The Jurchen used wooden coffins to bury their dead in the mountain but they did not mark the burial sites by building a mound or planting a tree. Meanwhile, the Khitan nobles still adhered to their traditional

⁸ The envoy's surname suggests that he was the member of the imperial clan. Wittfogel and Feng thought that this incident had occurred in 1055. However, Li Yiyou disagreed. Here I followed Li's conclusion. See Wittfogel and Feng, 280; Li Yiyou, "Liaodai Qidanren muzang zhidu gaishi [A Brief Study of the Khitan funerary system of the Liao dynasty]", *Neimenggu Dongbeiqu kaoguxue wenhua yanjiu wenji* (Beijing: Haiyang Chupan, 1991), 80-102, esp. 90.

⁹ Little information is available on the author of *Luting shishi* (hereafter LTSS), Wen Weijian, except that was a scholar with a *jinshi* degree from Yanshan (modern Beijing), as introduced by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 in *Shuo fu* (Taipei: Xinxing Shuju, 1963) 8: 174-5. Wen Weijian must have received his degree from the Liao shortly before its demise or possibly during the early Jin period prior to his defection to the Song. The text is said to have been written sometime after 1138. See Herbert Franke, "Chinese Texts on the Jurchen: a Translation of the Jurchen Monograph in the San-ch'ao pei-meng hui-pien", *Zentral-Asiatische Studien* 9 (1975):119-186, esp. 178. An English translation of the excerpts is provided in his article.

method of embalmment even after their state ceased to exist. When a wealthy Khitan died, his abdomen was cut open with a sharp knife and his internal organs were removed in the same manner as the corpse of Liao Taizong is said to have been treated. Then the corpse was cleaned and stuffed with fragrant herbs, drugs, salt and alum. When the abdomen was sewed up with a five-colored thread wire, the skin of the corpse was pierced with stalks of reed to drain out fat and blood. The process was completed by covering the face of the corpse with a mask made of gold and silver and tying its hands and feet with copper wire.¹⁰ His description of the process was proven to be accurate down to the details of the usage of death masks and copper wire when a number of the Liao tombs excavated during the last fifty years have yielded face masks and metal wire burial suits. We will return to this subject later.

It has been suggested that the Khitan embalmment technique was an integral part of their custom of “guizang 歸葬 (returning to the ancestral land for burial)”. We discussed above how the corpses of the second Liao emperor and a Khitan envoy, who had died away from their homeland, were carefully prepared to endure the long journey home to be buried. Recent archaeological discoveries of the Khitan aristocratic tombs seem to confirm the prevalence of such practice. For instance, the epitaph from the tomb of a Khitan official named Yelü Yanning in Liaoning clearly states that he died while serving as Supervising Commissioner (*jiedushi*) in a northern border prefecture faraway

¹⁰ Herbert Franke, “Chinese Texts on the Jurchen”, 181-6; Wittfogel and Feng, 280.

from his ancestral home in 985.¹¹ His body is said to have been returned to the burial site in modern Chaoyang County in the following year.¹² Another burial site was unearthed in Faku County and identified as the resting place of Xiao Paolu, who appears to have been a high-ranking official during the reigns of Xingzong (r. 1031-1055) and Daozong. The tomb stele inscription also mentions that his body was returned for burial (*guizang*) to the current location.¹³ It is likely that the custom of *guizang* was practiced exclusively by the aristocrats, specifically the members of the two ruling clans, the Yelü 耶律 and Xiao 蕭. The final burial places must have been their entrusted estates or fiefdoms (*touxiazhou* 頭下州) which they had received from the emperor to rule almost autonomously.

Marco Polo wrote about the existence of similar custom among Mongol aristocrats in the thirteenth century. He claimed that the corpses of all the descendants of Ghinghis Khan had to be transported to Altai Mountain for burial no matter where they died and how long the journey would take to the site.¹⁴ In the light of textual comparison, we can speculate that various groups of peoples from the northern Eurasian steppes throughout history shared common socio-cultural phenomena, despite the ethnic-linguistic heterogeneity. Marco Polo further explained that whoever happened to witness the funeral procession of the deceased khan while his corpse was being transported to the

¹¹ He was active during the reigns of the fifth and sixth emperors, Jingzong, and Shengzong, respectively. No official biography on him is listed in the *Liaoshi*.

¹² Li Yiyou, "Liaodai Qidanren muzang", 90; "Liaodai Yelü Yanning mu fajue jianbao", *Wenwu* (1980)7:18-22.

¹³ Feng Yongqian, "Liaoning Faku Qianshan Liao Xiao Paolu mu" *Kaogu* (1983)7: 624-635.

¹⁴ John Andrew Boyle, "The Thirteenth Century Mongols' Conception of the After Life: the Evidence of Their Funerary Practices", *Mongolian Studies* 1(1974): 5-14.

final burial compound was killed to guard the secrecy of the burial site. The Mongols also believed that sacrificed humans were to serve the khan in the afterlife. According to him, at least twenty-thousand people were sacrificed when Monggu (Mönke) Khan died in 1259.

The *Liaoshi* clearly states that the humans were sacrificed at the interment of the deceased Khitan emperors. The purpose of the sacrifice was to simply provide attendants who would accompany and serve the emperor in his next life, for no mention can be found in the source that the imperial burial sites were kept secret. For the funeral of the dynastic founder in 927, hundreds of courtiers are said to have been killed “to accompany the emperor” by the order of his widow. However, this act was perhaps more of a disguised political purge devised by the ambitious empress to eliminate her opponents. When the fifth emperor Jingzong (r. 969-983) died, some of his loyal officials are said to have volunteered to be buried with the emperor.¹⁵ The discovery of the skeletons of a male and a female covered with copper-wire suits from the mausoleum for Shengzong has been suggested as possible evidence of the existence of human sacrifice.¹⁶ It is debatable whether the practice was reserved for the imperial funerals or not. At the Xiao family cemetery at Kulunqi in Inner Mongolia, a large quantity of bone remains, mainly crania and thigh bones, was found in one burial.¹⁷ They must have belonged to at least

¹⁵ LS 10:108-9; Wittfogel and Feng, 258.

¹⁶ Li Yiyou, “Liaodai Qidanren muzang”, 93.

¹⁷ This was the first burial discovered at the Kulunqi site. See “Jilin Zhelimumeng Kulunqi yihao Liaomu fajue jianbao”, WW (1973) 8:2-18. The tomb owner was not identified in the report. However, it is generally agreed that the Kulunqi cemetery belonged to the descendants of Princess Shuoguo, Shengzong’s second daughter by Empress Qinai, and her husband Xiao Xiaozhong (d. 1043). The princess received the territory surrounding the cemetery from her father as her “entrusted

ten young adults, adolescents and even a child. Some of the bones bear the signs of dismemberment prior to the burial. The initial excavation report suggested that the remains might have belonged to sacrificial victims.

Many peoples in Inner or North Asia, historically known to us, are said to have forced the widows of deceased khaghans and tribal chieftains to follow their husbands to death. The Uighurs clearly adhered to such practice, which was even forced upon a Tang princess, when her husband, Moyanche Khaghan, died in 759. She successfully persuaded the Uighur courtiers and escaped death by gashing her face with a knife as proof of her grief and loyalty.¹⁸ A very similar account is provided in the *Liaoshi* and other sources on the Khitan in which the widow of the first Liao emperor received remonstrance from the court officials for not following her deceased husband to death. She resorted to a similar method used by the Tang princess to successfully avoid her fate. She declared her sincere desire to follow her husband, had it not for her duty to take care of her young sons and the vast empire without a leader. She cut off her right hand at the wrist and placed it in the coffin of her husband. This is the only incident recorded in the histories on the subject of a wife being coerced to follow her deceased husband as far as the Khitan were concerned. We cannot say with certainty whether it was deeply rooted in the tribal tradition or it was simply devised by the political enemies of the formidable widow who feared a purge on a massive scale once she took over power. In any case,

prefecture (*touxiazhou*)” on the occasion of her marriage. See LS 37:449. See also LS 81:1285-6 for Xiao Xiaozhong’s biography. This particular burial is dated to 1080 or later by the Liao copper coins discovered in the tomb that bear the inscription of the sixth year of the Dakang (1075-1085) period.

¹⁸ Colin MacKerras, “The Uighurs”, in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. Denis Sinor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 326-7.

self-mutilation as sign of grief and respect for the dead leader was widely practiced by various pastoral peoples across Inner and North Asia. Türks are well known for their ancient custom of shedding “bloody tears” when their khaghans died. They slashed their faces with a knife to let the blood and tears flow down together. Even the Roman ambassadors, who happened to be present at the funeral of a Türkish khan in the late sixth century, could not escape performing this painful ritual obligation.¹⁹ The Jurchen of the twelfth century are also said to have upheld the same mourning rituals as Türks.²⁰

Besides humans, a number of animals were sacrificed at Khitan funerals. The *Liaoshi* says that a sheep was sacrificed when the body of Emperor Daozong was about to leave the funeral hall at the palace for the burial ground in accordance with time-honored tradition of the Khitan.²¹ On the wedding day of a Liao princess, a sheep and a specially adorned carriage were bestowed on her. They were to be used for her funeral in due time.²² Sheep might have been the preferred but certainly not the only animals to be sacrificed. The *Liaoshi* speaks of killing horses, oxen, pigs, dogs and camels in funerals. Except camels, bone remains of all the animals listed in the *Liaoshi*, as well as deer, boars, rabbits, squirrels and moles, were unearthed in the Khitan burials.²³ The

¹⁹ There was a continuous diplomatic exchange between Byzantium and the Türks throughout the sixth century. Roman embassy was headed by a figure named Valentine who must have arrived at the Türkish court sometime around 576. The funeral described above was for Siziboulos who is also known with his alternative name, Ishtemi. See Denis Sinor, “The Establishment and Dissolution of the Türk Empire”, *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, 285-316, esp.304.

²⁰ LTSS in *Shuo fu* 8:174-5; Herbert Franke, “Chinese Texts on Jurchen”, 184.

²¹ LS 50:840; Wittfogel and Feng, 280.

²² LS 52:864; Wittfogel and Feng, 277.

²³ “Neimenggu Zhelimumeng Nailinhao Liaodai bihuamu”, *Kaoguxue jikan*, 1(1981), reprinted in *Zhongguo Kaogu jicheng*, 966-974.

discoveries seem to support the claims made by the contemporary Song observers that the Khitan nobles liked to consume the meat of moles and rodents.²⁴

No animals were revered as highly as horses by the Khitans. Horses were not only sacred animals that had a special place in their myths of origin and tribal religions but were the most valuable assets in the Khitan economy, not to mention their indispensable military roles. It is not surprising that the court issued an edict in 992 to forbid killing of horses for funeral when the Khitan were at war with their southern neighbor, the Northern Song (960-1127). Burying armor and precious metals was also forbidden.²⁵ The effect of this edict must have been unsatisfactory for a similar decree was issued again in 1043. This time oxen and various precious objects were added to the list of forbidden items.²⁶

It is particularly noteworthy that in the funeral for Shengzong camels and horses are said to have been burned along with his personal objects such as his clothes, bows, arrows and horse-riding equipment.²⁷ The Wuhuan people from the third century C.E. are also said to have burned dogs, horses and personal belongings of the dead man. They believed that a dog would protect the spirit of the dead to arrive safely to their sacred ancestral mountain.²⁸ While the *Liaoshi* does not mention the role of dogs in the imperial funeral, the mausoleum of Daozong yielded wooden dogs. Considering that Daozong is known to have been a devout Buddhist, it is very likely that they were replacements for

²⁴ Li Wenxin, "Yixian Qinghemen Liaomu fajue baogao", *Kaogu xuebao* 8(1954), reprinted in *Zhongguo Kaogu jicheng*, 1868-1885.

²⁵ LS 13:142; Wittfogel and Feng, 261.

²⁶ LS 19:228; Wittfogel and Feng, 263.

²⁷ LS 50:839.

²⁸ Albert Dien, "A New Look at the Xianbei", 43.

live dogs that would normally have been interred with the deceased emperors.²⁹ Like the Wuhuan, the Khitan must have believed that dogs, particularly white ones, possessed a supernatural power to protect them and bring good luck. Every autumn it is their national custom to sacrifice white dogs in front of their tents (*yurt*) and bury them with their mouths exposed. A few days later they moved their tents to the spot where the dogs were buried.³⁰ When the Liao conquered the Later Jin state in 947 and Taizong entered its palace, the Chinese observed the Khitans slaughtering dogs and hanging their skins at every door of the palace in celebration of their victory.³¹

Burning animals and possessions of the dead are said to have been practiced by the Jurchen nobles of the twelfth century and later by the Mongols. The dynastic history of the Yüan (*Yüanshi* 元史) records that food and fermented mare's milk were burned, in addition to animals and personal belongings, during the court ceremony honoring the dead ancestors of the Mongol emperors.³² This ceremony, referred to as “Burning food (*shaofan* 燒飯)” in the *Liaoshi*, was also performed by the Khitan emperors when they visited the mausoleums of their predecessors on national festivals and anniversaries of their deaths. A platform ten feet high was constructed, on which the emperor offered solemnly a large plate of food and libations for their ancestral spirits and burned them. Although not explained in the *Liaoshi*, a Chinese named Hu Jiao, who had lived in the

²⁹ Wittfogel and Feng, 271.

³⁰ It was precisely on the eighth day of the eighth month when the Khitan slaughtered white dogs seven steps away from their sleeping tents. Seven days later on the Mid-Autumn Festival, the tents were moved over on top of the burial spot of the dogs. LS 53:878; Wittfogel and Feng, 271.

³¹ XWDS 72:896; Wittfogel and Feng, 271.

³² John Andrew Boyle, “The Thirteenth-century Mongols”, 12; Wittfogel and Feng, 279.

Liao as a captive for seven years, wrote about a ritual of “breaking the goblets (*paozhan* 抛盞)” that followed *shaofan* to formally signal the completion of the imperial funeral. After Shizong (r. 947-951) entered the mausoleum of Taizong with a number of tribal chieftains carrying sacrificial utensils, the entrance was shut and remained closed until the following morning. When they came out, they referred to the ceremony as *paozhan* and declared that the funeral just ended. However, they refused to explain the meaning of the ceremony when Hu Jiao inquired about it.³³ It has been suggested that the act of destroying the utensils and containers used for offering food and wine sacrifice was employed perhaps to sever the connection between the dead and the living completely so that the dead would not come back to eat the food of the living.³⁴

So far I have investigated the postmortem practices of the Khitan described in extant literature. Parallels can be found among various pastoral peoples in North and Northeast Asia who are known to have flourished in the region before and after the Khitan. Underneath their common practices lies their concept of afterlife, which they perceived as essentially identical as their lives in this world. They expected that they would continue to engage in animal-herding, hunting and drinking wine in their next lives just as they had done on earth. Therefore, one could not afford to forget to bring all his belongings, particularly, his *yurt*, horses, saddles and hunting equipment, to the next world. John de Plano Carpini, a Franciscan friar, who was sent to meet the Mongol Khan, Guyuk, in 1246 at the request of Pope Innocent IV, was shocked to discover that the

³³ Wittfogel and Feng, 280; XWDS 73:906.

³⁴ Li Yiyou, “Liaodai Qidanren muzang zhidu gaishuo”, 96.

Mongols upheld such a materialistic perspective of afterlife with no concept of “eternal damnation or everlasting life”.³⁵ It is very likely that the Khitan also shared the same idea of afterlife and strove to provide the dead with resting places that resembled their residences in life as closely as possible, as we will see below.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, dynastic histories and essays remained the only available sources on the subject of the Khitan postmortem culture. The situation changed when French missionary-scholar, Joseph Mullie, who conducted an extensive geographic survey in Inner Mongolia in early 1920s, came across the ruins of the ancient city of *Zuzhou* 祖州, where the mausoleum of the Khitan dynastic founder, Taizu, and his empress was located, according to the descriptions in the *Liaoshi*. The exact location of the mausoleum at *Zuzhou* remains elusive still today. However, a few years later, he discovered the imperial burial complex called Qingling 慶陵 in Chifeng County, Inner Mongolia. Qingling contained three mausoleums, in which emperors Shengzong, Xingzong and Daozong were interred, respectively. Mullie is considered the pioneer of modern Liao archaeology.³⁶ His research was soon succeeded by a group of Japanese scholars who were doing avid research in Japanese-controlled Manchuria at the time. Among them, Torii Ryuzo’s research is still considered as the single most important publication on the subject of the Liao cities and Qingling.³⁷

³⁵ John Andrew Boyle, “The Thirteenth-century Mongols”, 5-6; Christopher Dawson, *Mission to Asia*, (Tronto: University of Toronto, 1980), 12-14.

³⁶ Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Liao Architecture*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii), 22-7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*,.

During the last five decades, the field of Liao archaeology has seen remarkable developments thanks to the effort of archaeologists in People's Republic of China. Although the exact number is not available, it is said that at least several hundred Liao tombs have been unearthed in the provinces of Inner Mongolia, Liaoning, Jilin and Hebei, not to mention a handful of pagodas and Buddhist temples. One recent estimate claims that over a thousand tombs dated to the Liao period were discovered in Liaoning Province alone.³⁸ Among them, only one hundred-forty were officially documented. Out of one hundred forty, fifty-five tombs could be dated with relative accuracy based on the inscriptions on the steles, coffins or by coins. Roughly forty tombs seem to have belonged to the Han Chinese occupants living under the Khitan rule, while merely twenty to the Khitan occupants. This estimate reflects some of the chronic problems in Liao archaeology where the documentation of discoveries is often delayed or neglected due to various reasons.³⁹ Notwithstanding such problems, a considerable number of excavation reports of the Liao tombs published in various Chinese archaeological journals are now accessible to us. It is neither possible nor necessary to present a comprehensive study here on all the Liao tombs excavated so far. The purpose of this study is to increase our knowledge of the physical and mental worlds of Khitan women during the dynastic period as reflected in their postmortem culture. By investigating their final resting places and the funerary artifacts interred with them, we may be able to get a glimpse of their ideas of the afterlife as well as their daily lives on earth. Therefore, the burials of Khitan

³⁸ Li Yufeng, "Liaoning diqu jinian Liaomu yanjiu", in *Shenyang Wenwu*, 1(1993), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, vol. 16, 1571-6.

³⁹ Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Liao Architecture*, 26-7.

women will be the focus of our observation. The female occupants in the vast majority of dated and/or identified tombs were members of the Khitan aristocracy, specifically of the two ruling clans, the imperial Yelü clan and their permanent marriage partner, the Xiao. The burials of female Khitan commoners are unfortunately very rare and have yielded few artifacts. The Liao tombs belonging to Han Chinese who lived under Khitan rule outnumber those of Khitans. However, most of them will be excluded from this study except for a few special cases that demand our attention for the purpose of comparison with the Khitan tombs. The structures and architectural styles of the Liao tombs will be addressed only minimally, for they constitute a separate research. Recently, Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt and Dieter Kuhn published their immensely informative research on this subject. A list of selected burials of women in Khitan tombs is provided below.

Table 5. Liao Tombs of/with Khitan Female Occupants in Inner Mongolia

No.	Tomb occupant	Year of interment (CE)	Tomb location	Tomb description	Features
1	Qinde (910-923) and a unknown adult female	923	Alukeerqin Banner	A single-chambered tomb with a domed ceiling	Stone mini housing
2	Yelü Yuzhi and his wife, Chonggun	941	Alukeerqin Banner	Multi-chambered tomb with domed ceiling	
3	Prince of Weiguo (Xiao Qulie, 908-959) and his wife (from the Yelü clan)	959	Dayingzi Village, Chifeng	Multi-chambered with a domed ceiling and an antechamber; square floor plan	Wooden interior tent in the main chamber
4	An unidentified family burial (husband and wife)	Roughly same as Prince of Wei's	Shaozigou Village, Aohan Banner	Multi-chambered tomb with mixed floor plans	Wooden coffin housing
5	A single burial of a	Roughly	Tomb 2 at	Single stone chamber	Little burial goods;

No.	Tomb occupant	Year of interment (CE)	Tomb location	Tomb description	Features
	young adult female (commoner?)	same as Prince of Wei's	Bazhalaga, Keyouzhong Banner	with a rectangular floor plan	no coffin or corpse table; human sacrifice?
6	A single burial of a unknown female	980-1030	Shangdu County	A single-chamber with a domed ceiling made with stone; circular floor plan	Stone coffin
7	A single burial of a unknown female	980-1030	Shangdu County, Neimenggu	A single-chamber with a domed ceiling made with stone; circular floor plan	Stone coffin
8	Princess of Chenguo (1001-1018) and her husband Xiao Shaoju	1018	Naiman Banner, Zhelimumeng	Multi-chambered tomb with domed ceilings: circular floor plans.	Wooden interior tent
9	A unknown middle-aged female	1000-1050?	Tomb 101, Fanzhangzi, Aohan Banner, Neimenggu	Single chamber cave tomb(土洞墓) with a hexagonal floor plan and a domed ceiling.	Wooden interior tent; a complete horse skeleton and a sheep skull, a death mask and net-suit
10	An unidentified male and a female (possibly husband and wife)	Middle to Late Liao (1030-1055)?	Jiefangyingzi, Wengniuteqi, Neimenggu	A single chamber tomb with a circular floor and a domed ceiling	An octagonal shaped wooden interior tent; Wooden corpse table
11	A single burial of an unidentified female	Late Liao	Tomb 6 at Haociying, Chayouqian Banner, Neimenggu	Single-chamber with domed ceiling and an octagonal floor shape. Built with stone layers	Corpse table; no coffin or wooden housing Mask and net burial suit
12	A unknown female about thirty years old (possibly commoner)	Undated	Xinbaerhuzu Banner, Neimenggu		Stone coffin; a sheep scapula

Table 6. Liao tombs with/of Female Occupants in Liaoning Province

No.	Tomb occupant	Year of interment	Tomb location	Tomb description	
1	Single burial of unidentified gender (probably elderly female)	Early Liao	Zhangjiayingzi, Jianping County, Liaoning	Single-chambered tomb with square floor and an antechamber	Wooden interior tent; Corpse table (no coffin); gold crown, equestrian gear; animal bones
2	Single burial (no human remains found but probably female occupant)	Early Liao	Zhuluhecun, Jianping county Liaoning	Multi-chambered tomb	Wooden corpse table: a large quantity of mercury found
3	A single burial of an aristocratic lady possibly from the Xiao clan	950-980?	Yemaotai, Faku County	Multi-chambered tomb with a domed ceiling and an antechamber; square floor plan	Stone sarcophagus with outer coffin
4	Yelü Yanning (947-985) and his wife	989	Chaoyang County, Liaoning	Multi-chambered; domed ceiling	Stone sarcophagus
5	A single burial of unknown female	1004?	Qianchuanghu, Chaoyang county, Liaoning	Two side-chambers and a main chamber with a domed ceiling. Built with stone layers; circular-shaped side-chambers and a rectangular main room	Stone sarcophagus without coffin table
6	Geng Yanyi and his wife, Miss Yelü (Chinese)	1012	Guyingzicun, Chaoyang	Single chamber with an antechamber	
7	A single burial (possibly female)	1017-1027?	Baitaizixiang, Kezuo County, Liaoning	A single-chamber stone tomb with an octagonal floor.	Wooden interior tent, no coffin; a gold mask, bronze mirrors
8	Xiao Jin (981-1028)	1029	Guoshu Village, Fuxin, Liaoning	Two square shaped side rooms and an octagonal main chamber with a domed ceiling and an antechamber	
9	Lady Jinguo (wife of Yelü Yuan)	1038	Yaoweimen Village, Fuxin, Liaoning		
10	Lady of Qinjinguo (wife of Yelü Zongzheng)	1069	Beizhen County, Liaoning	Two hexagonal side-chambers and an octagonal main chamber with domed ceiling	

No.	Tomb occupant	Year of interment	Tomb location	Tomb description	
11	A single burial of an unidentified female	Early Late Liao Period (1057-1100)	Tomb 4 at Qinghemmen, Yixian, Liaoning	A single circular-shaped main chamber with antechamber	Equestrian equipment for female; a large quantity of ornaments
12	Xiao Paolu and his wife?	1090	Qianshan, Faku County, Liaoning	A hexagonal main-chamber with a domed ceiling and two side-chambers with square floors and a rectangular antechamber	Waterways on the tomb ground; a complete skeleton of a dog; partial bones of ox, horse
13	A unknown male and his wife?	1101-1110	Jianchang County, Liaoning	Two circular shaped side chambers and a hexagonal main chamber with a domed ceiling	Bone ashes were discovered. Possible evidence of cremation
14	A family burial (husband and wife)	Late Liao	Batuyingzi, Xinmin County, Liaoning	A circular shape main chamber with two small side-chambers with square floor-plan	Wooden interior tent; no coffin or corpse table; some amount of coal; gilt gold crown and gilt gold masks

Table 7. Liao tombs of/with Khitan Female Occupants in other Chinese Provinces

No.	Tomb Occupant(s)	Date	Location	Tomb Type	Features
1	Consort of Yelü Jiayili	1008	Pingquan County, Hebei	After the excavation in 1916, the tomb was severely damaged by flood.	An inscribed tomb stele discovered
2	Princess of Qinjinguo (970-1045), the eldest daughter of Jingzong and wife of Xiao Jixian	1046	Pingquan County, Hebei	A long and large rectangular-shaped front chamber with two circular niches and a main chamber with a circular floor	Stone coffin
3	Unknown family burial (commoners?)	undated	Liujiajie, Tuquan County, Jilin	Rectangular shaped vertical pit graves. Tomb 2 contained a female occupant	

As we can see above, the earliest Liao burial that yielded a Khitan female occupant is dated to the early tenth century, the beginning of the Liao dynasty. So far, only a handful of pre-Liao Khitan burial sites have been excavated and dated to the Tang period but none of the tomb occupants can be clearly identified as female. Nevertheless,

the discovery of the pre-dynastic underground Khitan tombs greatly challenged the claims made by various Chinese histories that the pre-dynastic Khitans placed the bodies of the dead on the trees without placing them in coffins or burying them.⁴⁰ One of them, *Old Tang History*, was compiled around 944, roughly twenty-five years after the Khitan confederation was transformed into a Chinese-style state. Its account of the Khitan postmortem culture is basically a reiteration of earlier sources such as the *Bei shi* 北史, compiled almost two hundred years earlier. The recent discovery of pre-and early dynastic burial sites reminds us again of anachronisms and inaccurate details contained in the primary sources. Therefore, it is necessary for us to remain critical and cautious when referring to them.

Almost all pre-dynastic Khitan burials are simple vertical pit graves. However, various methods were employed to dispose of the corpses ranging from using wooden or stone coffins, placing them on elevated platforms, or direct interment without any equipment.⁴¹ In one burial, the bone remains appear to have been cremated prior to the interment, although it is difficult to determine whether the remains had been subject to three-year open air deterioration as the historical sources describe.⁴² Bones of sacrificed animals, mostly sheep, were also found in the tombs along with equestrian gear, weapons and daily utensils. Over all, the early Khitan burials exhibit a considerable similarity to

⁴⁰ Zhang Baizhong, “Qidan zaoqi wenhua tansuo”, *Kaogu* 2(1984):183-186.

⁴¹ Feng Jiqin, Menggu Tuoli, and Huang Fengzhi, *Qidanzu wenhuashi*, (Changchun: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1994), 171-2.

⁴² *Ibid.*; Zhang Bozhong, “Neimenggu Zheli faxiande jizuo Qidanmu”, *Kaogu* 2(1984), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 15, 791-3.

those of their forebears, the Xianbei, who also placed their dead in supine position with straight limbs in vertical pit graves with sacrificed animals.⁴³

It is unclear when the Khitan began burying their dead and whether their adoption of the new practice replaced their traditional one entirely. As late as the end of Southern Song, almost a hundred years after the collapse of the Liao dynasty, the Chinese observers continued to write that the Khitan living under the Jin rule let the corpses deteriorate on the large wooden poles.⁴⁴ It is possible that poor Khitans never abandoned their mortuary tradition mainly due to economic reasons. The discovery of numerous Khitan tombs dated to the Liao period, however, seems to suggest that many Khitans, particularly the upper class, fully incorporated into their culture the practice of interring the dead in subterranean tombs. I will briefly summarize here some of the general features of the Khitan tombs listed in the tables above.

Selecting the Burial Grounds and Tomb Structures

The vast majority of the Khitan aristocratic tombs including all three imperial mausoleums at Qingling are located on the sunny ridges of large mountains overlooking creeks and dense forests. It appears that they thoroughly investigated the landscape and chose scenic areas. The tomb of the Princess of Chenguo 陈国公主, for instance, was discovered in the slope of Mountain Qinglong in Inner Mongolia (Table 5). It is unclear

⁴³ Albert Dien, "A New Look at the Xianbei", 40-59.

⁴⁴ Feng Jiqin, Menggu Tuoli and Huang Fengqi, *Qidan zu wenhuashi*, 187. A Southern Song envoy to the Jin court named Lou Yue 楼钥 traveled through the Khitan area and observed that the Khitan placed their dead on erected high wooden poles instead of burying them.

whether the Khitan were influenced by the Chinese ideas of geomancy (*fengshui* 风水) in selecting their burial sites. However, the Khitan tombs were not oriented to north and south, as Chinese tombs were, but were tilted forty-five degrees to southeast. This is consistent with the description of the Song envoy, Shen Gua 沈括, that Khitan tombs were located in the southeastern corners of mountains.⁴⁵ It is also possible that their preference of burial sites and orientation naturally grew out from their time-honored tradition of worshipping the sun and the direction from which the sun rises.⁴⁶

All dated tombs with identified tomb owners, listed in the tables above, belonged to Khitan aristocrats. The majority of them have two or more chambers with domed ceilings. Some undated tombs, such as Tomb 7 at Yemaotai 叶茂台 in Faku County, Liaoning (Table 6), also appear to have belonged to the Khitan nobles, considering their complex structures and a large yield of burial goods. Multi-chambered subterranean tombs commonly consist of one or two full-sized chambers (*zhengshi* 正室), two smaller side-chambers (*ceshi* 侧室), an antechamber, and a relatively long approach ramp. There is no doubt that this tomb structure originated in China in the Han dynasty or even earlier. A number of Tang and Han tombs exist in the Liao territory.⁴⁷ Only the emperors were allowed to be buried in impressive seven-chambered complexes that had three large chambers and four side-rooms, as the Qingling mausoleums well demonstrate. Generally,

⁴⁵ Li Yiyu, “Liaodai Qidanren muzang zhidu gaishuo”, 81-2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Liao Architecture*, 315-6.

⁴⁷ Jessica Rawson, “Creating Universes: Cultural Exchange as Seen in the Tombs in Northern China between the Han and Tang Periods”, in *Between Han and Tang: Cultural and Artistic Interaction in a transformative period*, ed. Wu Hung (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001), 113-149, esp. 114; Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Liao Architecture*, 266-270.

the corpses of the occupants were placed in the back chamber and various burial goods such as porcelains, tools and equestrian gear in the side-rooms. The tomb of the Princess of Chenguo and her husband makes the perfect example of this structure with one large main chamber in which the occupants were placed and two smaller side-chambers. The only aristocratic burial with three full size chambers discovered so far is the tomb of an imperial son-in-law, Prince of Weiguo 卫国王, in Chifeng County, Inner Mongolia (Table 5). The body of the prince and his wife were placed in the middle-room instead of the back room.⁴⁸ Less distinguished nobles were generally interred in the tombs with a single burial chamber with niches or “ear chambers” (*ershi* 耳室).

Since the vast majority of the multi-chambered tombs are dated to mid-dynastic or to the early phase of the late dynastic period, i.e. the reigns of Shengzong, Xingzong and the first half of Daozong, some archaeologists initially believed that the simple single-chamber structure was the dominant style during the early dynastic period, which gradually yielded to multi-chambered tombs towards the end of the tenth century.⁴⁹ This theory that Liao tomb construction followed such a development pattern is no longer tenable. The joint burial of Yelü Yuzhi 耶律羽之 and his wife (Table 5), dated to 941, discovered in 1992, is the second earliest Khitan aristocratic burial unearthed so far and demonstrates very high-level of construction already at this early date. It consists of three chambers with a domed ceiling and decorated antechamber and connecting corridors. Its structure is almost identical to that of the tomb of Princess of Chenguo built

⁴⁸ Zheng Shaozhong, “Chifengxian Dayingzi Liaomu fajue baogao”, *Kaogu xuebao* 3(1956):1-26.

⁴⁹ Xiang Chunsong, “Zhaomeng diqude Liaodai muzang”, *Neimenggu Kaogu Wenwu* 1(1981):73-9.

almost a century later. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the complexity of the tomb structure and the elaborateness of the interior decoration do not reflect the style of a specific era but the status of the occupant.⁵⁰

The majority of the Khitan tombs were constructed with bricks. The second common building material was stone. Occasionally a combination of both materials was used.⁵¹ Cave tombs are very rare. The single example listed above was unearthed in Aohan Banner in Inner Mongolia (Table 5) and appears to have belonged to a modestly wealthy Khitan female. There are also a small number of vertical pit graves with no inner chamber constructions. They must have belonged to poor Khitan commoners or slaves.

The floor plans of Liao tombs vary. The tombs dating to the early dynastic period generally have square or rectangular-shaped burial chambers. The combination of a round domed ceiling and square-shaped floor of the burial chamber was clearly originated in China during the Han or perhaps much earlier and endured throughout the Tang times. The round ceiling represents Heaven and the four-cornered ground Earth, respectively, according to the Chinese thoughts on cosmos and its correlativity to human affairs. In this way, the tomb occupants were buried in their own microcosm of the universe.⁵² The tombs of Prince of Weiguo (d. 959) and Yelü Yuzhi (d.941) are two good examples of the early Khitan aristocratic burials that employed this time-honored

⁵⁰ Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Liao Architecture*, 315; Li Yiyou, “Liaodai Qidanren muzang zhidu gaishuo”, 82-4.

⁵¹ Li Yiyou, “Neimenggu Liaodai Qidanren muzangde xingzhi he fenqi”, *Beifang minzu wenhua* (1991), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 15, 769-781; “Liaodai Qidanren muzang zhidu gaishuo”, 82-4.

⁵² Jessica Rawson, “Creating Universes”, 114-5 and 140-141.

combination of a square floor and a round domed ceiling. Sometime during the last two decades of the tenth century, however, circular-shaped burial chambers seem to have become popular. The earliest Khitan tomb with such floor plan belongs to an official named Yelü Yanning 耶律延宁 and his wife, (Table 6), which is dated to 985.⁵³ Its two side chambers and antechamber remained square. This tomb was built some thirty later than the earliest Liao tomb with the circular chambers identified so far. The owners of this tomb in the outskirts of Beijing were Chinese nobleman named, Zhao Dejun 赵德均 and his wife Miss Zhong 种, who died in 937 and in 958, respectively, according to the tomb inscription.⁵⁴ They were interred in an impressive nine chambered burial complex with all of its rooms in circular shape. The structure of this tomb can hardly be considered typical compared to contemporary Chinese and Khitan tombs. It has been suggested that this tomb possibly served as a model for Shengzong's mausoleum almost eighty years later, although the latter was constructed with only seven chambers.⁵⁵ We are yet to explain why this seemingly sudden change of preference regarding the tomb floor plans occurred and what the implications are. Does this mean that the owners of these Liao tombs no longer subscribed to the Chinese ideas of the cosmos and afterlife? If that was the case, is it possible that the Liao dedication to Buddhism for both Chinese and the Khitans had something to do with this change? In any case, the popularity of circular burial chambers did not wane until the end of the dynasty. Roughly thirty years

⁵³ Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, 287-8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 331-4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 332-4.

after the death of Yelü Yanning, Princess of Chenguo, Shengzong's niece was interred in a tomb with all circular rooms.

Along with the circular tombs, sometime in the early eleventh century, burial chambers with octagonal and hexagonal floor plans emerged as the newly dominant architectural type. The earliest dated tomb so far with an octagonal burial chamber belongs to a Khitan aristocrat, Xiao Jin 萧仅 (981-1028).⁵⁶ Identical floor plans were employed at two of the imperial mausoleums at Qingling, in which Xingzong and Daozong were interred. Another common feature of the tombs dated to the middle or late Liao period is that different floor plans were employed in a single tomb. For instance, the aforementioned Xiao Jin's tomb has square-shaped side-chambers and antechamber with an octagonal burial chamber. A tomb belonging to a member of the imperial clan found in Wengniuteqi, Inner Mongolia also has extraordinary plans with two hexagonal side-chambers with an octagonal burial chamber.⁵⁷

The interiors of the earlier aristocratic tombs were not heavily decorated except for the lintels above the doorways and column tops. After the mid-Liao period, it seems to have become fashionable among the aristocrats to decorate all the walls of the chambers, connecting corridors, antechambers and approach-ramps with mural paintings of diverse subjects. The most common subjects include portraits of the tomb occupants

⁵⁶ Zhu Zifang, "Liao Chenguo gongzhu, Xiao Jin muzhi dangyi", *Liaohai wenwu xuekan* 1(1988), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 14, 247-253.

⁵⁷ "Neimenggu Shanzuizi 'Gu Yelü shi' mu fajue baogao", *Wenwu ziliao congkan* 5 (1981), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 15, 1303-5.

surrounded by female and male servants, seasonal landscapes, animals and birds.⁵⁸ Some paintings contain typical nomadic themes such as servants preparing saddled horses for their owners, depiction of various animals essential to pastoral lifestyle including sheep, camels and deer, and seasonal hunting excursions. The mural paintings from the tombs of Princess of Chenguo and the Xiao family cemetery discovered in Kulun Banner, Inner Mongolia, are considered the most elaborate and best preserved ones.⁵⁹ The wedding ceremony of a Khitan princess, scenes of “Departure (*chuxing* 出行)” and “Return (*guilai* 归来)”, depicted in Tomb 1 at Kulun Banner, are especially valuable sources for our understanding the process of the imperial wedding ceremony and the Khitan attire, for in the murals numerous servants and nobles are depicted.⁶⁰

Interment of the Dead

In the burial chambers of many Khitan aristocratic tombs, wooden inner tents (*guoshi* 槩室), complete with walls, ceilings and entrances, were constructed. They were unearthed in all types of tombs-brick tombs, piled stone tombs and even in the cave-tombs. Modeled after the shapes of the burial chambers, they were built in square, circular, octagonal or hexagonal shapes. Unfortunately, most have not survived in their entirety and succumbed to deterioration. The dead were placed inside of the wooden

⁵⁸ Li Yiyou, “Liaodai Qidanren muzang gaishuo”, 85-7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* The largest painting was discovered in Tomb 8 at Kulun Banner that covers the entire walls of 30-meter-long approach ramp. Unfortunately, it was not well preserved. See also Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, 294-306.

⁶⁰ Linda Cooke Johnson, “The Wedding Ceremony for an Imperial Liao Princess”, *Artibus Asiae* 44 (1983):107-136; “Jilin Zhelimeng Kulunqi yihao Liaomu fajue jianbao”, *Wenwu* 8(1973):2-18.

tents and completely closed off from the outside. Along with the domed ceilings, the construction of wooden interior tents constitutes the hallmark of Khitan-Liao tombs.⁶¹ Most dated tombs and some undated tombs listed above that possibly belonged to nobles were equipped with wooden interior tents. Particularly, Tomb 101 at Fanzhangzi, Aohan Banner is a rare example of a cave tomb with a wooden inner structure. It is unclear what practical functions these wooden inner tents served. Xiang Chunsong pointed out the external similarity between the wooden inner structures, particularly of octagonal shape, and the interiors of felt tents, *yurts*, still widely used by the modern Mongols.⁶² It is noteworthy that the ceilings of the wooden inner structures bear a small, octagonal shaped hole covered by a piece of wooden panel. The domed ceilings of burial chambers in many Khitan tombs also have such small holes in the top, which were covered by large stone slabs. A single female burial built with stone layers at Shangdu County (Table 5) and a family burial complex in Keshenshengke Banner in Inner Mongolia are good examples of the tomb structure with a skylight in the middle of the vaulted ceiling.⁶³ Another notable fact is that wooden inner tents in some tombs, such as those discovered at Jiefangyingzi and Jiaoquxindi in Inner Mongolia, were constructed in an octagonal shape although the floor plans of the burial chambers were circular or square.⁶⁴ This

⁶¹ Dieter Kuhn, *How the Qidan Reshaped the Tradition of the Chinese Dome-shaped Tomb* (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 1998), 36; Li Yiyou, “Neimenggu Liaodai Qidanren”, 769; “Liaodai Qidanren muzang gaishuo”, 84-5.

⁶² Xiang Chunsong, “Neimenggu Jiefangyingzi Liaomu fajue jianbao”, *Kaogu* 4(1979):330-334; “Neimenggu Chifeng Jiaoqu Xindi Liaomu”, *Beifang wenwu*, 4(1990):38-41.

⁶³ Fu Zhanjun who excavated the Shangdu tomb also remarked on the similarity of the interiors of the burial chamber and the *yurts*. See “Neimenggu Shangduxian Qianhaizicun Liaomu”, *Beifang wenwu* 2(1990):49-51. For the burials at Keshenshengke, see Xiang Chunsong, “Keshenkeshengqi erpadi yi er hao Liaomu”, *Neimenggu wenwu Kaogu* 3(1984):80-90.

⁶⁴ Xiang Chunsong, “Neimenggu Jiefangyingzi Liaomu”, 330-4.

seems to support Xiang's argument that the octagonal wooden tents were erected in the burial chambers for the purpose of creating an interior that closely resembled the inside of the occupant's living space during his/her life on earth, which was a *yurt*.

When the bodies were interred in the burial chambers, coffins were seldom used. Corpses were often placed directly on coffin-beds (*guanchuang* 棺床) or corpse tables (*shichuang* 尸床), most of which were made of wood with or without railings.⁶⁵ Some aristocratic burials dating to the middle or late Liao period contained stone or wooden coffins. However, the usage of coffins does not necessarily reflect the status of the tomb owner. Some of the most prominent royal clan members such as Princess of Chenguo and Prince of Weiguo were interred without coffins. On the other hand, a few burials with rather modest or virtually no burial goods yielded coffins.⁶⁶ So far the number of stone coffins outnumbers that of the wooden ones. Most stone coffins discovered so far are rectangular in shape. It is noteworthy that some are trapezoidal for they are wider at the head than at the foot.⁶⁷ Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt suggested that this style of coffin was particularly favored by the Xianbei, who were probably responsible for transmitting it to the Khitans.⁶⁸

When husband and wife were interred jointly in the same burial chamber, their bodies were commonly placed on a corpse table a bit larger than the one used for a single

⁶⁵ Coffin tables without railings were often unearthed in the burials of the Khitan commoners. See Li Yiyou, "Liaodai Qidanren muzang", 90-2.

⁶⁶ For examples, a family burial complex at Tuquan County in Jilin Province that consisted of seven graves produced seven stone coffins and a small collection of agricultural tools along with hunting equipment. See Zhang Zhongshu and Ma Dadong, "Jilin Tuquanxian Liujiatie Shiguanmu", *Wenwu ziliao congkan* 7, reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 15, 819-822.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*; "Zhaluteqi Fengshantun Qidanmu qingli jianbao", *Beifang wenwu* 3(1990):28-33.

⁶⁸ Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, 313.

burial. In unusual cases, two corpse tables were established in the chamber to accommodate the corpses separately. The remains of Yelü Yuzhi and his wife were placed on two different tables, each of which was located in the eastern and the northern corner of the chamber (Table 5).⁶⁹ Rarely, husband and wife were interred in one coffin as in the burial unearthed in Balin Right Banner (*youqi*), Inner Mongolia.⁷⁰

When the coffins were used, they were almost always placed on top of the coffin tables or platforms. Commonly coffins and coffin tables were made out of the same material. Coffins or corpse tables were often encased in larger wooden structures in the shape of a mini-house or a building, called *xiaozhang* 小帳.⁷¹ The architectural origin of *xiaozhangs* is not clearly explained, except that they were probably not the pure invention of the Khitan and their apparent proto-types were discovered in some of the early Tang aristocratic tombs.⁷² However, the Tang ones were made of stone and took the form of a large chest, rather than a house. *Xiaozhangs* do not appear to have been particularly popular during the middle and late Tang period but they were revived during the Liao dynasty. The Khitan aristocrats seem to have been quite fond of *xiaozhang* and under their patronage their overall size and quality were greatly improved. *Xiaozhangs* seem to have been fully incorporated into the mortuary tradition of the Khitan aristocrats already

⁶⁹ “Liao Yelü Yuzhi mu fajue jianbao”, *Wenwu*, 1(1996):4-32.

⁷⁰ Dong Wenyi, “Balinyouqi Chaganba shiyihao Liaomu”, *Neimenggu Wenwu Kaogu*, 3(1984):91-3.

⁷¹ Cao Xun, “Yemaotai Liaomuzhongde guanchuang xiaozhang”, *Wenwu* 12(1975):49-62.

⁷² Yu Hong’s coffin, dated to the late sixth century, with a tiled roof is perhaps the earliest house-shaped coffin and perhaps the proto-type of later *Xiaozhangs*. See Jessica Rawson, “Creating Universes”, 118-121. Cao Xun maintained that there is a considerable structural similarity between the Yemaotai *xiaozhang* and the stone chests discovered from the tombs of Tang princes and princesses such as those of Prince Yide, Prince Zhuanghui and Princess Yongtai. See Cao Xun, “Yemaotai Liaomuzhongde guanchuang xiaozhang”, 57-8.

by the beginning of the dynastic period. The remnants of their structures were found in early tombs such as those belonging to Yelü Yuzhi and Prince of Weiguo. In the tomb of Qinde, however, the earliest dated Khitan noble tomb, the corpses of Qinde 勤德 and an unidentified female were encased in stone mini-huts (*shifang* 石房) instead of wooden ones.⁷³ It is possible that stone mini-huts were the prototypes of the wooden models (*xiaozhang*) discovered in the later Liao tombs. The structural similarity is striking and does not appear coincidental. *Xiaozhangs* were commonly found in the burial chambers in which no wooden interior tents were erected, although a wooden inner chamber was constructed in the burial chamber of the Yemaotai tomb.

Because of the nature of the material, many wooden *xiaozhangs* were not well preserved. The best preserved and most elaborate model discovered thus far comes from Tomb 7 at Yemaotai in Faku County, Liaoning (Table 6). An unidentified elderly female was placed in a stone sarcophagus on top of a stone table, both of which were encased in a *xiaozhang* made of cypress wood. It looks like a miniature house complete with a roof, an entrance with a door-handle, two windows, and a multi-level balustrade at the base. Its dimensions were 2.59 by 1.68 meters and it stands about 110 centimeters high.⁷⁴ Its elaborate construction and detailing prove that the Liao people achieved a high-level of craftsmanship.⁷⁵

As for the Liao funerary mini-houses, *xiaozhang*, further investigation is necessary beyond the fact that they are of Tang or pre-Tang origin. Although the

⁷³ “Neimenggu Chifeng Baoshan Liao Bihuamu fajue jianbao”, *Wenwu* 1(1998):73-95.

⁷⁴ Cao Xun, “Yemaotai Liaomuzhongde”, 49-62.

⁷⁵ “Faku Yemaotai Liaomu jilue”, *Wenwu* 12(1975): 26-39.

Yemaotai *xiaozhang* was constructed according to the Tang wooden architectural style, it is significantly different from the Tang stone coffin cases from which many Chinese archaeologists contend the Liao *xiaozhangs* derived. The most conspicuous difference is that the Tang stone cases were not constructed in the shape of an architectural structure. It is also worthwhile to note that no such funerary houses have been found in the Song tombs, while a few wooden coffins in the shape of a house were unearthed in the Liao tombs belonging to the Han Chinese living under the Khitan rule.⁷⁶ It is highly plausible that the Khitan had a predilection for the Tang stone coffin containers and reinvented them into *xiaozhang* using different raw materials such as wood and borrowing architectural blueprints from the Tang and Song small timber buildings.

The stone sarcophagus takes up the most of the interior space of the *xiaozhang* with dimensions of 225 by 124 centimeters and a height of 88 centimeters. All of its interior and exterior surfaces except the base panel were lavishly decorated by carved motifs and paintings. Among the decorative motifs, four directional animals (*sishen* 四神) on each of the four walls of the sarcophagus stand out the most. This has been suggested as undisputable evidence that the Khitan ruling class were heavily influenced by Chinese thoughts and beliefs by the late tenth century or even earlier. On the inner wall of the sarcophagus, images of male guardians, females and a fantastic winged creature perching on top of a doorway were incised. One door is depicted as half-open and a female is lurking out behind it. Male figures appear to be guarding the doors surrounded by a number of female musicians and Heavenly Maidens (*feitian*)

⁷⁶ Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, 331-5.

飛天女) with wings in the background.⁷⁷ Depiction of such Chinese motifs contrasts sharply with the paintings on the surfaces of the stone coffin unearthed at Keshenkesheng Banner in Inner Mongolia, on which typical Khitan pastoral lifestyle was featured. The human figures depicted in the paintings are all Khitan, engaged in herding the flock of animals or hunting. This tomb is undated but is likely to have been built slightly earlier than the elderly lady's burial at Yemaotai. Other tombs with female occupants that yielded sarcophagi are the burials of Princess of Qinjinguo 秦晋国 at Pingquan in Hebei (Table 7) and Quanchanghu Village near Chaoyang in Liaoning (Table 6).⁷⁸

Preparation of the Corpses

I briefly explained above some of the Khitan embalming techniques described in Chinese literature. The process involved removal of the intestines and stuffing the inside of the corpse with alum and salt to preserve it as long as possible. The sources identify two individuals whose bodies were treated according to such method. Both were Khitan royalty and died in China away from their home. The second emperor, Taizong, died in 947 during the military expedition against the Later Jin, while a Liao diplomatic envoy named Yelü Di suddenly died in 1092 in the Song territory only three decades before the Liao dynasty collapsed. Wen Weijian, the twelfth century scholar who left the most detailed account on the Khitan embalment, explained that covering the face of the dead

⁷⁷ See “Faku Yemaotai Liaomu jilue”, 28. A female burial at Qianchuangghu Village at Chaoyang, Liaoning yielded a stone coffin decorated with almost identical motifs including *sishen* and male figures with a winged creature above their heads. See Jin Fengyi, “Liaoning Chaoyang Qianchuanghucun Liaomu”, *Wenwu* 12(1980):17-29.

⁷⁸ Zheng Shaozong, “Qidan Qinjinguo dachang gongzhu muzhiming”, *Kaogu* 8(1962):429-435 and 403.

with a gold or silver death mask and tying the limbs with metal wires signaled the completion of the whole process.

At the time of discovery, the majority of the Khitan tomb occupants were laid out on the table in supine position with straight limbs and their head facing east and feet west. In some cases, the heads were oriented toward north. Almost all of the Khitan remains were partial or whole skeletons, which makes it practically impossible to confirm whether they received the postmortem treatment as Wen Weijian attested. However, the usage of funerary masks has been proven by archaeological discoveries during the last three decades. In some tombs masks were found along with metal wire bodysuits that encased the corpses from head to toe. The most famous funerary masks belonged to Princess of Chenguo and her husband. At the time of excavation, their faces were covered with gold masks, which were connected to their funerary suits made of silver-wire netting. Unfortunately, the remains of the princess and her husband underneath the masks and the metal suits were completely decomposed leaving behind only a few pieces of cranial bones and teeth.

Another complete set of metal funerary suit and a face mask was unearthed at Tomb 6 in a collective burial site known as Haociying in Chaoyouqian Banner in Inner Mongolia.⁷⁹ The occupant of Tomb 6 is an unidentified female with her face covered with gilt copper mask and her body wrapped in layers of silk garments, on top of which a suit made of copper wire mesh was laid out. The modesty of this tomb stood in a sharp

⁷⁹ Lu Sixian and Du Chengwu, "Chayouqianqi Haociying liuhao mu qingli jianbao", *Wulanchapu wenwu* 2 (1982), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 15, 1442-8.

contrast with the overall lavishness exhibited by the tomb of Princess of Chenguo. It was a single-chambered tomb without niches, built by stone-layering, which yielded few burial goods. Perhaps its humbleness is one of the explanations of the relative obscurity of this tomb despite the fact that it produced the best preserved Khitan corpse so far. To the astonishment of the excavators, the corpse of the female was found almost intact with the hair still attached to the head. Its skin was dark brown and stiff like leather. The body appeared desiccated. It was 157 centimeter long but barely weighed ten kilograms, according to the initial forensic report. In other words, it appears to have been mummified. However, the forensic examination did not produce any conclusive evidence that the stiff skin condition resulted from draining bodily fluids by poking with a sharp object, as described in historical sources. No scars or distinctive marks were found on the chest and stomach that might suggest that the corpse underwent removing of the internal organs prior to burial. Interestingly, a small part on the top of her head appeared to have been shaven. This naturally raised a question whether the hair was removed for the purpose of trepanation, the practice of drilling small holes into a skull to take out the brain. In describing Khitan embalment, Wen Weijian does not mention the practice of trepanation. However, there is one source that speaks of the existence of the custom among the Khitan. A passage comes from an essay written by Zhang Shunmin 张舜敏, who lived a few decades earlier than Wen Weijian and had an opportunity to observe how the body of a Khitan envoy, Yelü Di 耶律迪, was treated after the sudden death of the latter in the Song territory in 1092. Zhang claimed that the skull of Yelü Di

was chiseled to make hole(s) while his stomach was cut open before it was hung upside down to drain the bodily fluids.⁸⁰

Trepanation constituted an important part of the complex postmortem tradition of the ancient nomadic warriors unearthed at the famous Pazyryk mound burials (*kurgan*) in the Altai mountain range in southern Siberia. The Pazyryk burials are dated to the latter half of the first millennium B.C.⁸¹ Corpses of a male and a female found in one mound clearly show that they were embalmed prior to the interment. Their abdomens bore the marks of being cut open and sewn up again. Portions of their skulls were also cut out to remove the brains and to be filled up with materials such as soil and various plants. It is particularly noteworthy that the skin of the man's corpse was covered with numerous little holes, evidently made by a sharp object like a knife. Rudenko speculated that the holes were made by the instruments that were used to inject the preservatives into the body.⁸² A woman's corpse found in another barrow retained a number of long and narrow scars on her skin that were incurred by slitting with a knife-like object. It is clear that the muscles were taken out from the slits on the chest and one of her thighs.

Although no clear evidence of trepanation was found on the Khitan female corpse at Haociying, one cannot ignore that a number of striking similarities exist between the postmortem practices of the Khitan and the semi-nomadic people buried at Pazyryk, despite such a long gap in time and a considerable geographical distance. Both Khitan and the Pazyryk people chose to place their dead with their heads to the east and the feet

⁸⁰ Wittfogel and Feng, 280, n. 215.

⁸¹ Sergei I. Rudenko, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1970), 279-291.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 280-281.

west. At the Pazyryk kurgan field, only the corpses from the burials with a lot of yield, which indicates the exalted status of the tomb occupants, were embalmed and placed in the log sarcophagi. The corpses from less distinguished tombs were simply placed on the corpse tables or directly on the ground. Herodotus wrote about the unique funerary customs of the Black Sea Scythians, active in the seventh century B.C. When their king died, the Scythians cut open the stomach of the corpse to clean it, stuff it with various fragrant plant matters, and reseal it. Then wax was poured onto the whole body so that it could endure a long wait until the tomb construction was completed. When the time for interment came, the corpse was transported on a wagon. As for the death ritual of the ordinary Scythians, the family and friends of the dead held a feast and shared food among themselves as well as making offerings to the dead, when they carried the body on a cart to the burial place. Personal belongings of the dead, including wives, horses, equestrian equipment and weapons were interred with the corpse.⁸³

The accounts from the Chinese dynastic histories on their threatening Northern neighbors from Xiongnu of the Han dynasty to the Mongols seem to echo the description of the Scythians by Herodotus that was written a few hundred years earlier than the beginning of the Han dynasty. I am not suggesting that there was a direct cultural connection between the ancient Scythians in Black Sea and the Khitans in Northeast China and Mongolia in the tenth century. Even if there were any, it would be impossible to find evidence to prove it. Nevertheless, cross-examination is still useful for it reminds us how semi-or full nomadic peoples in the Eurasian steppes developed very similar

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 282-4.

customs and how enduring they can be. Moreover it provokes us to look at other directions than Central China, for a change, when we contemplate on the origins of certain social and cultural traits of the Khitan. There is no doubt that the preservation of the corpse constituted the core of the Chinese mortuary tradition ever since the dawn of Chinese civilization. Keeping this in mind, some archaeologists jumped to the conclusion that the Khitan were greatly influenced by the Chinese ideas and methodology of preserving corpses, when they encountered the mummified Haociying corpse and other discoveries which will be discussed below.

Forensic tests of the hair of the Haociying female corpse confirmed that it contained extraordinarily high levels of various kinds of heavy metals, including aluminum, lead, vanadium and copper. Particularly, the level of copper is roughly one thousand times higher than that of ordinary modern humans. Moreover, the tissue samples from her stomach and the lower abdomen area were confirmed to contain a level of arsenium (As) seven to fourteen times higher than is considered normal.⁸⁴ It is difficult to determine whether the female died of some sort of arsenic poisoning or the metallic elements were injected into her body posthumously to function as preservatives. As for the high level of copper, it could have been resulted from the head of the corpse being encased in a copper headgear for roughly nine hundred years. In any case, the concentration of such a large quantity of metals is likely to have successfully delayed decomposition.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Lu Sixian and Du Chengwu, “Chaoyouqianqi”, 1453-4; Li Yiyou, “Liaodai Qidanren muzang”, 90.

⁸⁵ Feng Jiqin, Menggu Tuoli and Huang Fengqi, “Qindanzu de zangsu” in *Qidanzu wenhuashi*, 191-2.

The discovery of mercury and charcoal in some Khitan tombs leads us to speculate that the Khitan possibly used them and other substances, not listed in historical sources, in order to preserve the corpses. A large quantity of mercury was found on the empty table in the burial chamber of a tomb located near Zhuluke Village in Jianping County, Liaoning. Because no remains of the tomb occupant were recovered from the site, it is impossible to determine whether they were heavily contaminated with mercury or not.⁸⁶ On the other hand, two burials unearthed at Batuyingzi Village in Xinmin County in Liaoning and in Jiefangyingzi, Wengniuteqi in Inner Mongolia, respectively, yielded charcoal. Both were joint burials of husbands and wives. The excavation report of the Jiefangyingzi tomb describes that the ground of the burial chamber was entirely lined with charcoal pieces roughly ten centimeter-thick, which were topped with wooden panels. Some archaeologists, including Li Yiyou, consider the discovery of mercury as clear evidence of the Khitan assimilation of the quintessential Chinese method of preserving the dead that has been practiced by the rich since the early Han period.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, Feng Yongqian, another eminent archaeologist, claimed that the application of mercury was one of the funerary customs widely shared among many North and Inner Asians. The Tartar, for example, are said to have emptied the stomach of the dead to fill it up with salt and mercury. According to him, the discovery in the Jianping burial only proves that the Khitan also adhered to this typically Northern postmortem practice.⁸⁸ So

⁸⁶ Feng Yongqian, "Liaoningsheng Jianping, Xinmin de sanzuo Liaomu", *Dongbei kaogu yanjiu* 1 (1994), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 16, 1606-1619, esp. 1611-1612.

⁸⁷ Li Yiyou, "Liaodai Qidanren muzang gaishuo", 90-1.

⁸⁸ Feng Yongqian, "Liaoningsheng Jianping, Xinmin", 1619; "Liaoningdiqu sanshinianlai Liaodai kaogu shouhuo", *Dongbei kaogu yanjiu* 1 (1994), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 16, 1547-1551.

far the Jianping burial has been the only case reported in which mercury was found. Moreover, it produced no human remains, which seriously impedes our understanding of how the substance was applied. The evidence is simply not conclusive.

Masks and Burial Suits

So far quite a number of funerary masks and burial suits have been discovered. However, burials that have produced well-preserved, complete sets of the two items are rare. In some burials, face masks and metal-bottomed boots were interred together instead of the burial suits or metal-wire fabric. There are also several burials in which only funerary suits or traces of the metal-wire mesh were discovered without masks. Roughly forty funerary masks, either in whole forms or only a few pieces, have been unearthed and documented so far in about thirty five burials. Most of them were made of copper or gilt copper. Silver and gold ones, obviously considered much more valuable than copper, have been rare findings.⁸⁹ There are roughly ten burials in which funerary masks occurred together with either whole burial suits or patches of metal netting. The most striking example of such a case is the burial of Princess of Chenguo and her husband. At the time of excavation, each of their faces is reported to have been covered with a gold mask. Each of their bodies was encased in the silver-wire netting suit, which was connected to the mask. Even their fingers were wrapped in the netting gloves. Above

⁸⁹ I am following the estimate made by Liu Bing. See Liu Bing, “Shilun Liaodai zangsu zhongde jinshu mianju ji xiangguan wenti”, *Neimenggu Wenwu Kaogu*, 1(1994), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 14, 166-9. Mu Yi also provides the table of all the Liao tombs that produced masks and/or metal netting burial suits in his article, “Liaomu chutu di jinshu mianju, wangluo ji xiangguan wenti”, *Beifang wenwu* 4(1993), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 14, 173-8, esp. 174-6.

their heads, a pair of gilt silver crowns was placed and their feet were encased in boots made of gold and silver. The facial features of the two masks are clearly different. This suggests that each mask was specially manufactured to reflect the age, gender and facial characteristics of the tomb occupant. In comparison with the princess' mask, the facial features of the mask of her husband appear more man-like with a slightly larger face, wider nose and forehead.

The female tomb occupant at the Haociying burial was also wearing a gilt copper mask but the metal funerary suit was placed on top of her body wrapped in the multiple layers of silk garments. While the silk had suffered great damage from the water and mud that entered the burial chamber, the copper netting suit was relatively well preserved. According to the excavation report, it consisted of six parts; a headgear, chest piece, back piece, sleeves, pants, footgear and gloves, which were sewn together with thread wire. The mask was jointed to the headgear piece of the suit in a way similar to by which the gold masks of Princess of Chenguo and her husband were connected to their suits.

As for the possible functions and meanings of the masks and the metal wire netting, numerous hypotheses exist. Because the early discoveries were from well-furnished tombs with female occupants, such as Princess of Chenguo and the burials at Yemaotai, one of the initial theories was that the masks and the suits were the gifts that had been granted to the imperial daughters and their Xiao husbands on their wedding. This argument was based on the descriptions of the imperial ceremonies in the *Liaoshi*. On her wedding day, a princess received a specially decorated cart, pulled by an ox. A lamb was being carried in the cart. It was meant to be used for her funeral later in her life

to transport her body. She was also given funerary goods including fabric pieces to cover her body while being transported to the burial place. It is not specified in the *Liaoshi* that masks and burial suits were included in the items.

With the discoveries of non-aristocratic burials that yielded masks and metal suits, however, this argument is no longer tenable. Only two burials can be clearly confirmed that they belonged to the imperial sons-in-law of the Xiao clan according to tomb inscriptions.⁹⁰ In fact, the majority of masks and/or traces of burial suits were found in modest tombs that appear to have belonged to less distinguished Khitan nobles. They were certainly not reserved for the imperial daughters and their husbands. One thing is clear: the masks and metal netting suits constituted a part of the postmortem culture that was uniquely Khitan. So far only Khitan tombs yielded the masks and/or metal netting except one that belonged to a Chinese official, Geng Yanyi 耿延毅 (d. 1020), and his wife (d. 1012) from the imperial clan, Yelü, unearthed at Chaoyang, Liaoning.⁹¹ In this family burial, traces of silver wire netting were found without masks. Geng was a prominent civil servant during the reign of Shengzong (r. 983-1031) and his wife in fact came from the most powerful Chinese family in the entire history of the Liao dynasty, the Han family, which produced influential officials such as Han Zhigu, Han Guangsi (d. 981) and Han Derang (941-1011).⁹² Han Derang led the most successful career among all his clansmen, for he was appointed Northern Chancellor and Military Commissioner,

⁹⁰ These are the burials of Princess Chenguo's husband, Xiao Shaoju and of Xiao Dewon. See Mu Yi, "Liaomu chutude jinshu mianju", 177.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*,.

⁹² For more information on the Han family, Li Xihou, "Luelun Liaodai Yutian Hanshi jiazude lishi diwei", *Song Liao Jinshi luncong*, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 277-294.

the highest offices in Liao officialdom, which were normally reserved for Khitan aristocrats. He was so favored by Shengzong and his regent mother, the Empress Dowager Ruizhi, that he was granted an honorific membership of the imperial clan in 1004. His family was also allowed to intermarry with the imperial consort clan, the Xiao. Geng Yanyi's wife was niece of Han Derang and this explains why she was identified as the member of the Yelü clan in her tomb inscription, despite her Chinese ancestry. The fact that Geng and his wife were buried with the typically Khitan funerary objects, the metal wire mesh, is highly significant in the sense it provides us with a rare glimpse into the lives of some of the Chinese who successfully penetrated into the enclosed inner circle of power and became the members of the Khitan ruling class. Their assimilation to the Khitan customs and culture is likely to have been voluntary. In other words, they were "Khitanized" Chinese who chose to be buried according to the Khitan funerary tradition instead of following that of the Han Chinese.⁹³

It has been suggested that the structure of a Khitan metal funerary suit was very similar to that of the famous jade burial suits of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), unearthed from the tomb of Prince Liu Sheng and his wife Dou Wan at Mancheng, Hebei Province.⁹⁴ Liu Sheng's suit was constructed by joining over two thousand small jade pieces by gold wire thread. Like the Khitan copper suit from the Haoqianying burial, the Han jade suit consisted of six parts; back piece, chest piece, a pair of sleeves and trousers,

⁹³ I am quoting the term "Khitanization" from Hsingyuan Tsao, *Differences Preserved: Reconstructed Tombs from the Liao and Song Dynasties*, (Portland, Ore.: Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, 2000), 15.

⁹⁴ For the Han funerary practice and their ideas of afterlife, see Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979).

gloves, and shoes, plus a headpiece. Chinese archaeologists, Yang Jing and Mu Yi, were convinced of the Han origin of the Khitan metal burial suits. There is little debate that the jade suits were meticulously manufactured to completely encase the corpses and to prevent air from entering the suits. Chinese ideas of preserving corpses had a great impact on the Khitan and gradually transformed their original funerary customs, according to Mu and Yang. They also argued that the Yemaotai site is another good example of the prevalence of Chinese influence. The body of the elderly female noble lady was wrapped a dozen pieces of silk garments and her nose was stuffed with a small silver tube. In one of her hands, a crystal ball was found.⁹⁵

Notwithstanding the structural similarities between the Han and the Khitan burial suits, it is difficult to prove that the Khitan masks and the burial suits were used for the purpose of preserving the bodies. Unlike the tightly sealed Han jade suits, the Khitan ones were made with metal netting with numerous holes. While the heads of the Han prince and the princess were completely encased in the helmet-like jade headgear, the Khitan funerary masks cover only the frontal surface of the owners' heads. Moreover, the discovery of a mask with burnt bone remains, apparently cremated prior to the interment, at the Aohanqi Baitazi burial site challenges the hypothesis that the masks and burial suits were supposed to function to delay the decomposition process of the bodies.⁹⁶

Another popular explanation for the function of a Khitan mask is that it was the kind of religious tool for the shamans or it was meant to protect the dead from any evil

⁹⁵ “Faku Yemaotai Liaomu jilue”, *Wenwu* 12 (1975):26-39, esp. 30.

⁹⁶ Shao Guotian, “Aohanqi Baitazi Liaomu”, *Kaogu* 2 (1978):119-121.

spirits during his journey to the next world.⁹⁷ It has been suggested that the Khitan tomb occupants whose faces were covered with the masks are likely to have been shamans during their lifetime. Shamans of modern Orchon tribes living in the northeastern tip of Inner Mongolia still wear wooden masks when they perform their religious rituals.⁹⁸ It is clear that the Khitan were deeply attached to their traditional religious beliefs and the shamans played a significant role in all the seasonal ceremonies at the Liao court.⁹⁹ When the Khitan emperors worshipped the sacred mountain, God of Fire or prayed for rain, shamans were invariably present, offering incantations and sacrifices, according to the *Liaoshi*. Masks have been widely used by many different ancient cultures across the world from Asia, America even to Australia, as the essential tools to invoke and to communicate with the spirits and gods. In China masks with both human and beast-like features were unearthed from the burials dated as early as the Shang and Zhou dynastic periods.

Although I do not rule out the possibility that the Khitan masks were endowed with some religious significance, I hesitate to accept the hypothesis entirely that the tomb occupants buried with the masks were shamans. While the majority of the Khitan masks have features of young or elderly adults, a mask that appears to have belonged to a child was also discovered at a family burial (Tomb 5) at Shangshaoguo 上燒鍋, Inner Mongolia. It is considerably smaller than the other two masks unearthed in the same

⁹⁷ Guo Shuyun, "Functions and Features of the Shamanic Masks", *Central Asiatic Journal*, 47:1(2003):163-182.

⁹⁸ Du Xiaofan, "Shitan Liaomu chutu de mianjiu, tongshi wangluo yu zongjiaode guanxi", *Liaojin Qidan Nüzhenishi yanjiu* 2 (1986), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 14, 182-6, esp. 183.

⁹⁹ For seasonal ceremonies, see LS 53:877-879. A partial translation is available by Wittfogel and Feng, 268-272.

tomb with only 11.4 centimeter long and 10 centimeter wide. The facial proportions also suggest that it was made for a small child.¹⁰⁰ It is hard to believe that this child tomb occupant as well as the most exalted aristocrats like Princess of Chenguo and her husband all had the same occupation as religious functionaries.

The *Qidan guozhi* mentions that the Khitan women liked to paint their faces with gold-color powder, their eyebrows red and their lips black. This style of make-up was called “Buddhist cosmetic (*fozhuang* 佛装)” and had been in fashion since the sixth century in North China. It is possible that the Khitan fondness for gold make-up was transferred to their pre-burial preparation of the corpses. In order to conceal the process of corporeal deterioration, the dead were probably encased in the metal burial suits and face masks.¹⁰¹ Considering that the Khitan aristocrats and even less distinguished nobles delayed the interment for at least few months and that the dead were often not placed in the coffins, it was perhaps necessary to cover the decaying corpses with special attire during the funerary procession and the interment. However, only aristocrats could afford to use pure gold masks. Ordinary nobles had to be satisfied with gilt copper ones.

In searching for the origins of the Khitan masks, many archaeologists believe that the Zhoujiadi 周家地 cemetery in Aohan Banner in Inner Mongolia offers an important clue. A young male occupant found at Burial 45 had his face encased in a hemp mask decorated with small copper pieces and green gemstones (turquoise).¹⁰² Then the masked

¹⁰⁰ Liu Bing, “Shilun Liaodai zangzude jinshu mianju”, 168; Xiang Chunsong, “Shangshaoguo Liaomujun”, *Neimenggu Wenwu Kaogu*, 2(1982):56-63.

¹⁰¹ Liu Bing, “Shilun Liaodai zangzude jinshu mianju”, 169-170.

¹⁰² Yang Hu and Gu Zhijie, “Neimenggu Aohanqi Zhoujiadi mudi fajue jianbao”. *Kaogu* 5(1984):417-426.

face was covered with a large shell. In another burial, a female corpse was also found with her face covered with a shell. This cemetery has been identified as belonging to the culture of the Upper Xiajiadian Period (夏家店上層文化) which flourished roughly during the Warring States Period (403-221B.C.). Some attributed the Xiajiadian Culture to the Donghu 東胡 (Eastern Barbarians), a generic appellation for Northeast Asian peoples described in Chinese histories. Others have argued that the Shanrong 山戎 were responsible for the Xiajiadian sites.¹⁰³ In any case, the Zhoujiadi cemetery is located in the middle of the Khitan heartland and many Khitan tombs have been excavated nearby. Since the Chinese dynastic histories claim that the ancient Donghu tribes were ancestors of the Khitan, some scholars have concluded that the Zhoujiadi hemp veil represented the proto-type of Khitan metal masks. In other words, the masks were evidence of the cultural and ethnic continuity of the two peoples, despite the fact that they were separated by more than a thousand years. This is plausible considering the geographical proximity and the discovery of some forms of masks in both Khitan and Zhoujiadi sites. However, it is again difficult to prove the existence of direct connection. Moreover, relying too heavily on the vague descriptions of various “barbarians” in Chinese dynastic histories in identifying an excavated site can lead us into a pitfall. That the Zhoujiadi site belonged to historical Donghu tribes remains a speculation. We also face another problem that requires explanation. So far no masks have been discovered at the burials of Xianbei, who are said by the histories to have been descendants of the Donghu and the direct

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*,

ancestors to the Khitans. If the funerary custom of using face masks was transmitted from the builders of the Zhoujiadi cemetery in the third or fourth century B.C. to the Khitans in the tenth century, we are left with the question of why it was not manifested in the Xianbei burials.

The recent discovery of a gold mask from a mound tomb at Yili, Xinjiang, might shed a new light on the origins of the Khitan masks.¹⁰⁴ At the time of excavation, this earth mound tomb was filled with a large quantity of gold and silver utensils and decorative objects of superb craftsmanship, including a gold drinking cup decorated with numerous pieces of agate, a silver vase and a gold urn studded with ruby pieces. Like the Khitan masks, the Yili gold mask was made out of thin hammered gold sheets and was equipped with all the necessary facial features such as eyes, eyebrows, a nose, a mustache, beard and a mouth. A pair of deep-set large eyes, below thick eyebrows, depicted in the mask does not appear to represent typical East Asian features. The eyebrows, beard and mustache were originally decorated with small pieces of ruby and other gemstones but some of them had fallen off and were missing when the mask was found. This burial is dated to the sixth to seventh centuries. All the artifacts found in the tomb, including the mask, clearly reflect influence from the west. Unlike the Sui-Tang and Liao tombs, no porcelains were buried. The excavation report describes the Yili area as the homeland of the ancient Wusun people of the Han times which later became the territory of the Western Türks (Tujue 突厥) by the time when the Yili tomb was built. The tomb

¹⁰⁴ An Yingxin, "Xinjiang Yili Zhaosuxian gumuzang chutu jinyinqi deng jingui weuwu", *Wenwu* 9 (1999):4-15.

occupant was not identified in the report. However, the discovery of a horse skeleton, pieces of armor and weapons suggests that he was a warrior, possibly a Türkish aristocrat. The Khitan tribes were under Türkish rule during the sixth to the early seventh centuries when the latter were the most dominant power in the steppes. In addition to the similarities between the Türkish and Khitan funerary customs discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the Türks greatly influenced the development of early Khitan political and social organizations. Considering their historical connection and their mutual fondness for gold, silver and agate as funerary objects, not to mention the horse sacrifice, this author is inclined to believe that the Khitan death masks were likely to have originated in the steppes or farther west rather than in Central China.

Unique Funerary Objects of Khitan Women

In addition to the face masks and metal wire burial suits, Khitan aristocrats were lavishly furnished with a variety of goods in their final resting places. Burials dating to the early and middle-Liao period tend to yield a larger quantity of artifacts, including precious ornaments, while the later tombs were generally simply provided, often with Buddhist-related objects. Typically, female nobles were buried with a lot of silk, porcelain, bronze mirrors, daily utensils such as plates, cups, knives, irons and scissors, wooden funerary furniture, and a large quantity of ornaments made of various materials. Among all the tombs unearthed so far, those belonging to Princess of Chenguo and to an unidentified lady at the Yemaotai site produced the most impressive collection of embroidered silk. At Yemaotai, over ninety pieces of fabric made of seven different kinds of silk were

originally interred. Unfortunately most of them were severely damaged and did not survive in complete forms.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps the most distinctive funerary objects, aside from the masks and metal nettings, are gold and silver crowns. I mentioned above that a pair of gold plated silver crowns was placed above the heads of Princess of Chenguo and her husband. The two crowns have different shapes; the one belonging to the princess has shorter body length (26 cm tall) with two high wings on both sides (30 cm long). Its front and the surfaces of the wings were incised with the patterns of phoenix (*fenghuang* 鳳凰) in the clouds. No wings were attached to the crown belonging to her husband. It has the shape of a long tube, standing 31.5 centimeter high with 18 centimeter in diameter, with much more elaborate decorative patterns incised on all surfaces, featuring phoenixes, clouds and flowers.¹⁰⁶ The style of the princess' crown with wings was apparently reserved for females. A headgear of the same style was also found at the elderly noble lady's burial at Yemaotai. This one was made of silk instead of metal with the embroidered patterns of fantastic animals (*qilin* 麒麟) and flowers.¹⁰⁷

Two burials found in Liaoning Province, one at Zhangjiayingzi, Jianping County and the other at Qianchuanghu, Chaoyang, also produced gilt silver crowns with similar decorative motifs.¹⁰⁸ The occupant of the Qianchuanghu burial was identified as a female

¹⁰⁵ Li Yiyou, "Liaodai Qidanren muzang gaishuo", 92-3.

¹⁰⁶ "Liao Chenguo gongzhu fuma hezangmu fajue jianbao", *Wenwu* 11 (1987):4-24.

¹⁰⁷ "Faku Yemaotai Liaomu jilue", 26; Tian Guanglin, "Qidan Yishi Yanjiu", reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 14, 435-450, esp. 438-9.

¹⁰⁸ Feng Yongqian, "Liaoningsheng Jianping, Xinminde sanzuo Liaomu", 1606-1619; "Liaoning Chaoyang Qianchuanghucun Liaomu", *Wenwu* 12(1980):17-29.

who probably died at the age of approximately forty. Although the excavation report of the Zhangjiayingzi tomb was unclear about the gender of the bone remains of the occupant, they also appear to have belonged to a female judging by the discovery of ornaments such as earrings, bracelets, and many bronze mirrors. The crowns from these two burials appear almost identical. They were also shaped like long tubes like that of the princess' husband but their fronts are higher (about 20 centimeter) than the backs. The upper part of the crown has scalloped edges in the shape of gradually descending hills of a mountain. On the frontal surface of the crown a pearl in the flame flanked by a pair of phoenixes is depicted with patterns of clouds and flowers in the background.

The meanings and the origins of the Liao crowns are still debatable. Some have argued that they were imitations of the Buddhist headgear that capped the bodhisattva statues made during the Tang or perhaps earlier.¹⁰⁹ Notwithstanding the structural similarities between Tang bodhisattva headdresses and Khitan crowns, the patterns depicted were clearly different. The majority of Khitan crowns were decorated with patterns of birds and flowers, dragons, flaming pearls (sun), clouds and a human figure in a halo. The excavation reports identified this figure as a Daoist, not Buddhist. It is certainly possible that the structure of the Khitan crowns were borrowed from the Buddhist headgear of the Northern and Southern Dynasties period 南北朝 (317-589) and Tang period, particularly considering that the Khitan aristocrats were very dedicated to the religion. However, we are still left with a question why only the Khitan Buddhists

¹⁰⁹ Xu Bingkun, "Qindan guanshi he beifang minzude Jinguan chuantong", *Liaoningsheng kaogu bowuguan xuehui chengli dahui* (1981), reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 14, 469-471; Yang Fuxue and Du Doucheng, "Liu jin shuanglong yinguan zhi foxue zhi qu" *Beifang wenwu* 2(1999):22-26.

chose to imitate the bodhisattva headdresses but not the Tang or Song Buddhists, or even the Chinese Buddhists living under the Liao rule. In other words, why were the Khitans uniquely fascinated by golden headgear?

The Khitans were not the first northerners who showed a fondness for golden headdresses or anything gold for that matter. Chinese histories noted that crowns and golden ornaments were typically characteristic of peoples of the North Asian Steppes. The Xianbei tribes during the Wei-jin period are said to have worn headdresses decorated with gold pieces called “*buyaoguan* 步搖冠”.¹¹⁰ The discoveries of the Xiongnu and Xianbei golden headdresses at Alucaideng, Hangjin Banner, Inner Mongolia and Beiyaofangshen, Liaoning, respectively, confirm the validity of the historical accounts.¹¹¹ However, the structures of the Xianbei and the Xiongnu crowns were considerably different from their Liao counterparts. The famous Xiongnu headgear from Alucaideng consisted of two main parts, a skull cap on top and a two-tiered gold band in a form of tiger head. Gold headgear are said to have been popular in Koguryō (37 B.C.-668) and as well as in Japan. In fact, the Liao gilt silver crown exhibited at Museum of Fine Arts in Boston was initially mistaken for a Koguryō product when it arrived at the museum in 1940.¹¹² It is possible that the style of Wei-jin 魏晉 Buddhist headdresses was first known to Koguryō where it was locally developed before it was transferred to Japan and to the early Khitans. There is little doubt that the Khitans had direct contact with

¹¹⁰ Xu Bingkun, “Qidanguanshi” 470.

¹¹¹ For the Xiongnu crown, see Tian Guangjin and Guo Suxin, “Neimenggu Alucaodeng faxiande Xiongnu yiwu”, *Kaogu* 4(1980):333-338. For the Xianbei burial, see Zheng Long, “Neimenggu Zhalanuer gumujun fajue jianbao” *Kaogu* 12(1961):673-680.

¹¹² Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, 9-11.

Koguryō at least during the late sixth century, when they sought an allegiance from Koguryō to dodge a major military threat from the Türks.¹¹³

In Khitan society golden crowns symbolized the authority and status of the wearers. According to the *Liaoshi*, Khitan emperors were to wear them only on the most important ceremonial occasions such as performing sacrifices to their ancestors and to the sacred mountain, Muye.¹¹⁴ On less significant ceremonial occasions, they wore hats. It is noteworthy that the emperors wore white gowns with the golden crowns, for the Khitans appear to have believed that the same attire was worn by divine beings or immortals. The *Liaoshi* describes the dream that Empress Chunqin, wife of the first emperor, had, in which she saw a handsome god in white clothes with a golden crown on his head leading twelve animals, before she got pregnant with her second son, who later ascended the throne as Taizong.¹¹⁵ In this sense, the Khitan might have believed that one can be spiritually empowered by borrowing the attire of divine beings. Perhaps that is why the emperors would wear golden crowns and white gowns when they paid respect to their ancestral spirits and to the gods of the mountain. However, emperors were not the only ones entitled to wear golden headgear. High-ranking officials were instructed to wear special hats decorated with gold pieces to celebrate the birth of imperial heirs.¹¹⁶ The discoveries of crowns in a number of aristocratic burials clearly confirm it. So far no crowns have been found in the tombs belonging to Khitan commoners.

¹¹³ Jennifer Holmgren, “Yeh-lü, Yao-lien and Ta-ho”, 44-51.

¹¹⁴ Tian Guanglin, “Qidan yishi yanjiu”, 438; LS 56:905-6.

¹¹⁵ Wittfogel and Feng, 238; LS 37:447.

¹¹⁶ Tian Guanglin, “Qidan yishi yanjiu”, 439; LS 53:872.

Besides the crowns, Khitan nobles, regardless of gender, were extremely fond of decorating themselves with ornaments made of gold, silver and various valuable stones. At the time of the excavation, both Princess of Chenguo and her husband were discovered wearing ornaments from head to toe, although the corpse of the princess was more lavishly decorated than her husband. Each of them was wearing a chest lace made of numerous amber tubes and silver wire and a belt decorated with hanging gold ornaments. Moreover, the princess had a pair of earrings made of pearls and amber on her ears, a string of pearls tied together with silver wire around her neck, a pair of gold bracelets carved with double-dragon pattern on her wrists and eleven large gilt gold rings on all of her ten fingers. With a gilt silver crown and a gold mask on her head and a pair of silver boots with gold flower decorations on her feet, virtually every part of her body was covered with jewels and ornaments.

A pair of similar chest laces made of amber and agate was also found in the much earlier tomb of Yelü Yuzhi and his wife.¹¹⁷ Yet another one comes from the tomb of the Prince of Weiguo, dated to 959, but with slightly different materials. It consisted of pieces of agate, turquoise and coral in addition to amber.¹¹⁸ Open ended gold bracelets with the shape of dragon heads and large gold rings with incised flower patterns must have been in fashion among female aristocrats. Fish shaped ornaments and silver utensils with double fish decorations were also favored. Among them, gold earrings in the shape of a fantastical fish with a head of a beast, unearthed at the burial of Yelü Yuzhi and at

¹¹⁷ “Liao Yelü Yuzhi zhi mu fajue jianbao”, *Wenwu* 1(1996):11-12 and 28.

¹¹⁸ Zheng Shaozhong, “Chifengxian Dayingzi Liaomu fajue baogao”, *Kaogu xuebao* 3(1956):1-26.

the Keshenkeshengqi site, are particularly noteworthy.¹¹⁹ This motif is known in Chinese as *mojie* (摩竭). Recently it has been suggested that *mojie* clearly originated in the Indian mythical figure, *Makara*.¹²⁰ In addition, a number of glass objects found at the tomb of Princess of Chenguo, including two vases and a footed drinking cup with a handle, reflect Islamic influence in the craftsmanship and the detailing.¹²¹ Bowls and cups made of agate, white jade, or crystal also constituted the essential items that accompanied Khitan female nobles.¹²²

Among all the impressive funerary artifacts, perhaps the most distinctive items that are clearly associated with the Khitan ethnicity are the equestrian implements. Even a number of burials belonging to the female occupants yielded them. Two complete sets of horse-riding gear were unearthed at the burial of Princess of Chenguo and her husband. Saddles were made of silver and decorated with gilt patterns. Cruppers, bridles, halters and stirrups were all made of either silver or silver plated iron. One of the sets must have belonged to the princess. It is unlikely that these were actually used by the tomb occupants during their lifetime. They were probably specially manufactured as funerary goods. At the Yemaotai site, an elderly noble lady was also buried with a similar gilt silver saddle, a stirrup, a bit and a rein decorated with crystal pieces.¹²³ Over one hundred twenty pieces of equestrian implements, roughly a hundred of which were gilt

¹¹⁹ Zhang Jingming and Zhao Aijun, "Liaodai Jinyinqide qixing wenshi yanbian ji gongyi", *Beifang wenwu* 1(2000):39-45.

¹²⁰ Sun Ji, "Jianguo yilai Xifang Guqiwu zai woguode faxian yu yanjiu", *Wenwu* 10 (1999):69-81.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 77-8.

¹²² Li Wenxin, "Yixian Qinghemen Liaomu fajue baogao", 1868. See also "Faku Yemaotai Liaomu jilue", *Wenwu* 12 (1975):26-39.

¹²³ "Faku Yemaotai Liaomu jilue", 27.

bronze bridles and buckles, were unearthed in another burial belonging to a female in the Qianchuanghu burial in Liaoning, dating roughly to the early eleventh century. This tomb also yielded a gilt silver high-crown discussed above. Right next to the equestrian gear, three weapons were placed on the burial chamber ground. Two of them were short spears and the other a full-sized sword (77 centimeter long), all of which were made of iron. In addition, a crystal axe head and an iron arrowhead were also found. The original excavation report speculated that the occupant was a noble woman, possibly a shaman, mainly because of the discovery of a gilt silver crown, which is considered by some as a possession of a religious functionary. I am not entirely convinced by the idea that crowns were shamanistic paraphernalia. However, this tomb no doubt belonged to a woman of exalted status, possibly a warrior. She could have served in the military during her lifetime. This is not far fetched considering the extraordinary martial qualities exhibited by some of the Khitan empresses and their kinswomen, who led military campaigns abroad in person and kept their own standing armies, as discussed in the earlier chapters. As late as the latter half of the eleventh century, women were furnished with equestrian gear in their final resting places, despite the rhetoric of sinicization and the sedentary lifestyle of the ruling Khitans described by contemporary Song observers and modern historians. At the Qinghemen burial site, a female occupant was discovered with a set of stirrups that were relatively small in size. They were likely to have been specially manufactured to fit the female riders.¹²⁴ The discovery of horse-riding gear and boots in

¹²⁴ Li Wenxin, “Yixian Qinghemen Liaomu fajue baogao”, 1868-1892. See particularly the report on Tomb 4, 1880-1891.

these burials certainly verify the claims of written sources that Khitan women rode horses like their men and drove carts pulled by oxen. The imperial women retained the privilege of riding camel-driven chariots on special ceremonial occasions.¹²⁵

In contrast to the aristocrats, ordinary Khitan women were interred with few burial goods and no valuables. At Liujiatie in Jilin, bone remains of a female were found in a simple stone coffin in a vertical pit grave. The only funerary goods buried with her were a container made of cypress-bark and a stone spinning wheel.¹²⁶ From a modest burial site at Xinbaerhuzuo Banner, Inner Mongolia, the complete skeleton of a young female was discovered, again in a stone coffin in a pit grave. A sheep scapula and remains of clothing were placed on each side of her head. A simple copper bracelet with no decorations was also wrapped around her wrist and an unglazed pottery jug was placed next to her body. It is noteworthy that possible evidence of human sacrifice was found in what appears to have been a female commoner's burial at the Bazhalaga site in Keyou Middle Banner (*zhongqi*), Inner Mongolia (Table 1). The remains of a young female, possibly in her twenties, were found on a stone slab placed on the floor of a stone burial chamber. A few items, such as a pair of copper earrings and a copper coin, were placed next to her. Underneath the stone slab, the skeletal remains of a young male were placed in a narrow pit facing downward with the straight limbs. He was not furnished with any artifacts. With all these things in consideration, the excavation team believed

¹²⁵ LS 55:900.

¹²⁶ “Zhang Zhongshu and Ma Dadong, “Jilin Tuquanxian Liujiatie Shiguanmu”, 819-822.

that the male occupant was sacrificed to accompany the female placed in the main burial chamber.¹²⁷

Although human sacrifice is said to have occurred at the imperial funerals according to the *Liaoshi*, little archaeological evidence has been discovered so far. The only other site that might have been associated with such a custom was the first burial discovered at the Xiao family cemetery at Kulun Banner, Jilin.¹²⁸ The tomb owner(s) was likely to have been a descendant(s) of one of Shengzong (r. 983-1031)'s daughters and her husband, Xiao Xiaozhong (d. 1043). Partial skeletal remains belonging to over ten young adults were found. The tomb is dated to 1080 or later by the discovery of Liao copper coins manufactured during the sixth year of the Dakang 大康 period (1075-1085). If confirmed, this will serve as strong evidence that the Khitan adhered to their tribal custom of human sacrifice until the late Liao period.

Summary and Conclusion

It is indisputable that the tomb model-subterranean architectural structure with a room or rooms-employed by the Khitan during the Liao dynastic period was originated and developed in China in the Han dynasty or possibly much earlier. To be more precise, the Khitan tomb builders adopted a particular Chinese tomb model prevalent in North Central China from Han to Tang dynasties, whose characteristics include using bricks as building material, a burial chamber with a domed ceiling, an elaborate tomb entrance, and a long

¹²⁷ Su Ritai, "Keyouzhongqi Bazhalaga Liaomu", *Neimenggu kaogu wenwu*, 2(1982):64-68.

¹²⁸ "Jilin Zhelimumeng Kulunqi yihao Liaomu fajue jianbao", *Wenwu* 8(1973):2-18, reprinted in *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng*, Vol. 15, 897-906.

and slanting approach ramp. Many pre-Liao tombs with such structural patterns have been discovered in the provinces of Liaoning, Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Hebei and even as far as in Henan. The decorative patterns of the Liao tombs also appear to have followed closely to those commonly employed at the Chinese aristocratic tombs in these regions from the Han to Tang dynasties. Stone tomb inscriptions, stone spirit paths and painted interiors are a few standard features of this tomb type that were transmitted to the Khitans. There is no doubt that the Khitans, particularly the elite, readily accepted sophisticated funerary arts of the Chinese as soon as they established their empire. However, their willingness to adopt the Chinese traditions does not appear to have resulted in a wholesale abandonment of their original mortuary practices.

Chinese experts on the Liao archaeology often suggested a development pattern of the Liao funerary culture based on the chronology, which is marked by three distinct periods of the early, the middle and the late Liao. The early period refers to the time frame from the establishment of the dynasty and to the reign of the fifth emperor, Jingzong. The reigns of Shengzong, Xingzong and the first half of Daozong's reign are generally considered as the middle period, while the last fifty years of the dynasty is roughly falls into the late Liao period. According to this developmental model, the Khitan funerary tradition underwent a great transformation due to the massive importation of the Chinese culture and goods. The evidence of thorough infiltration of the Chinese culture and lifestyle is much more prominent in the middle and late Liao tombs compared to the earlier tombs. As one of the most compelling evidence of the process of "sinicization" of the ruling Khitans, they suggested that the typical Khitan

artifacts such as equestrian gear and porcelain vessels modeled after the leather saddle bags gradually lost their popularity as funerary goods as it went further into the dynastic era. The lack of equestrian implements in later tombs is simply the reflection of the changes in the lifestyle of the Khitans from mobile to sedentary one. In addition, more Buddhist related artifacts were discovered in the late Liao tombs, along with a few Buddhist temples and pagodas that were erected during the Liao and survived to the present day. From the view point of these Chinese scholars, such discoveries confirm beyond dispute the historical accounts that the Khitan elite were deeply dedicated to Buddhism, which replaced their old shamanistic beliefs, particularly due to the strong support from the emperors, Shengzong, Xingzong and Daozong. While the burial goods deposited in the Khitan and Chinese tombs dated to the early Liao period strongly reflect the ethnicity of the occupants to a considerable degree, the later Liao burials appear largely homogenous.

Although by and large I consider that this developmental model contains many valid points, it oversimplifies and ignores some of the important details of the Liao funerary traditions manifested in the discoveries in order to present it as another case of successful “sinicization” of the foreign elites, who entered the Chinese soil and established a state modeled after the Chinese dynasties. While the Khitan elite readily accepted the basic architectural structures of the Chinese underground tombs, the Liao tombs are by no means exactly identical to the pre-Liao Chinese tombs in the North central regions. Unlike the Chinese tombs that were placed on an axis of east and west with the main entrance facing the south, the majority of the Liao tombs were oriented to

southeast. It may appear a trivial alteration of the tomb, but it was probably done consciously by the Khitan tomb builders because facing the direction was somehow significant to them.

Another remarkable transformation is visible in the aspect of the tomb floor plans. The time-honored architectural combination of domed ceiling and four-cornered ground floor of the main burial chambers, which is of the Han dynasty origin, was still employed by the Khitan tomb builders during the early Liao period. Towards the late tenth century, however, this structure gave its way to the sudden popularity of various floor shapes, such as circular, octagonal, hexagonal or mixture of two different floor plans for the main burial chamber and the side rooms to the point that square or rectangular shaped burial chambers are hard to find in the later Liao tombs, regardless of the ethnic identity of the owners. We are yet to explain what brought about such changes in the tomb floor plans and how octagonal and hexagonal shapes were significant to them. Discoveries so far seem to suggest that the Khitans initiated using these floor plans in their tombs, which were probably spread to the Han Chinese.

I am hesitant to endorse the suggestion that the adoption of a certain Chinese mortuary practices and tomb architectural styles by the foreign elites serve as indisputable evidence that they understood and fully accepted the underlying Chinese ideas of afterlife and the universe. In other words, when a Khitan aristocrat chose to be interred in an elaborately manufactured sarcophagus fully decorated with the images of four directional animals and flying Heavenly Maids and placed in a square room topped by a domed round ceiling, as was the case for the elderly noblewoman buried at

Yemaotai, we should not hastily jump to the conclusion that the tomb occupant thoroughly subscribed to the Chinese beliefs. Besides the stone coffin encased in a wooden mini house built in a Chinese architectural style, two silk scroll paintings belonging to Five Dynasty artistic trend and a complete set of a Chinese board game called Double Six (*shuanglu* 雙陸), elaborately made of lacquered wood, were also unearthed from her tomb. The excavators of the tomb hailed the discovery of these quintessential Chinese items as clear evidence that the Khitan aristocrats became considerably sinicized by the late tenth century.¹²⁹ Far less attention has been given to a drawing on one of the walls of a inner wooden structure in the burial chamber, depicting two Khitans on galloping horses who appear to be chasing an animal on a hunting excursion, perhaps due to its crudity and stylistic simplicity using only black outlining, compared to the high level of artistry exhibited in the two scroll paintings portraying classical themes such as landscape and birds with flowers.

There is little doubt that the Khitan aristocrats were fascinated by the large underground mortuary structures of the Chinese when they first encountered them. The same can be said of their contact with the utensils, decorative objects and luxury goods imported from China or manufactured by the Chinese craftsmen in the Liao territory. They were probably all eager to collect these goods as symbols of their wealth and power and many chose to be buried with them. However, the fact alone that they had possessed these Chinese goods is not convincing enough to conclude that they altered their lifestyle considerably and began to share the same values and popular beliefs of the Han Chinese.

¹²⁹ WW 1975:12, pp. 32.

The presence of this drawing of hunting scene in the inner chamber walls of a noblewoman's tomb suggests that portraying of this sort of activity was deemed important by the tomb builders and perhaps by the occupant. Yemaotai is no exception for a number of the tombs, whose owners were identified as Khitan, produced mural paintings and coffin decorations that depict typically nomadic lives, such as herding the animals on horseback, hunting with a hawk and dogs, men with the distinctive Khitan hairdo preparing meat in the kitchen, and a wedding procession of a Khitan princess. Some of these paintings were found in the tombs dated to the late Liao period.

In addition to the mural paintings, we cannot simply downplay the significance of the fact that certain funerary paraphernalia occurred exclusively in the Khitan burials, not in the Chinese ones. Death masks and the burial suits made of metal wire are the most compelling evidence that the Khitan continued to preserve their own cultural identity. Princess Chenguo, niece of Shengzong who is considered to have begun massive importation of the Chinese institutions, was interred in her tomb wearing a golden facemask, a golden crown, a silver bodysuit and a pair of silver riding boots. An identified female of lower social status was found in her humble burial chamber at Haociying covered with a very similar burial suit made of copper. Such funerary custom is unknown in China prior to the Liao period as well as in the subsequent imperial eras. Another extraordinary funerary artifact discussed in the chapter in association with the Khitans was a set of equestrian equipments unearthed in the tombs of both females and males throughout the dynastic period, despite the decrease of their during the late Liao period. A luxurious silver funerary saddle, belonging to Princess Chenguo, and a

complete set of equestrian implements from the Yaomaotai burial exhibit high level of craftsmanship and testify that the Khitan women were not confined in their quarters and enjoyed outdoor activities like their male counterparts. No women of the Han Chinese ethnicity have been found so far with the horse-riding gear.

Although it is clear that the quantity of these uniquely Khitan objects deposited in the late Liao tombs is considerably smaller compared to that from the burials dated to the middle or even to the early Liao period, this fact alone cannot serve as decisive evidence to the argument that this was the result of the sinicization of the Khitans, as some have suggested. The reasons for the decrease are more complex and manifold: first, the number of the burial goods of all types significantly declined during the late Liao period. From 1030s on, numerous restrictions on manufacturing and trading of various metals, such as gold, silver, iron and copper, along with precious stones like jade, were imposed by imperial decrees.¹³⁰ As mentioned above, disposal of articles made of metal and animal sacrifice at funerals was prohibited during the reigns of Xingzong and Daozong. The enforcement of these bans must have caused the decrease of the funerary goods to a considerable degree. Some of the imperial decrees authorizing these sanctions revealed the concern of the Liao government about the trafficking of these metals to other tribal nations and neighboring states like the Song and the Xixia, who could manufacture weapons to use against the Liao army.¹³¹ These bans reflect the growing anxiety of the Liao in the late eleventh century. Their once mighty military machine began to show

¹³⁰ Wittfogel and Feng, 153-4.

¹³¹ Wittfogel and Feng, 178.

vulnerability since 1050s, which resulted in the gradual loss of control of their conquered subjects within and without the borders, who resorted to frequent invasions and rebellions. That the Khitan rulers were no longer dominant figures in the international politics is reflected in the sharp decline of the number of tributary missions and gifts from the foreign states and tribes to the Liao court after 1050.¹³²

Considering all the circumstances described above, it is not far fetched to speculate that the Liao aristocrats no longer enjoyed an easy access to various kinds of luxuries, particularly those made of precious metals, to be disposed in the burials by the late Liao period. Despite the decrease of the amount of the funerary articles, the popularity of the practice of burying the remains of animals with the dead never waned throughout the dynastic period. It should be noted that the evidence of animal sacrifice occurred almost always in the tombs of the Khitan occupants, regardless of their social and economic status. Even the activity of possible human sacrifice is suspected in two burials, one of which certainly belonged to the aristocratic family cemetery dated to the last two decades of the Liao period.

While the vast majority of the Chinese tombs excavated so far produced the evidence of cremation prior to interment, only a fraction of the Khitan burials reveal the signs of the method being employed. The sudden popularity of the cremation among the Chinese population living in the Liao territory or even in the Northern Song has been explained by their dedication to Buddhism. However, this explanation does leave us wonder why the Khitans, many of whom, particularly the aristocrats, were also devout

¹³² For more information on the tributary missions to the Liao court, see Wittfogel and Feng, 345-362.

Buddhists, did not adopt cremation with more enthusiasm. The patterns of Khitan preparation of the corpses appear quite arbitrary throughout the dynastic period, for various methods continued to be used in parallel from direct interment without using sarcophagi to the application of the embalming substances possibly to deter the corporal deterioration.

To sum up, the Khitans inherited the tomb construction and decoration from the Tang and the northern dynasties established by the Xianbei from the fourth to sixth century, rather than from their southern neighbor, the Song despite the proximity. The Liao tombs were not mere imitations of earlier tombs in North Central China. The Khitans were selective in adopting Chinese tomb building traditions and often reinvented them to accommodate their unique needs, as discerned from the change of tomb orientation and introduction of novel floor plans with multiple angles. More importantly, various artifacts discovered inside of the Khitan tombs clearly reflect that their distinctive mortuary customs were preserved throughout the dynastic period without giving way to a wholesale sinicization. I found no convincing evidence to prove the claim that a considerable degree of homogeneity is displayed in the funerary goods found in the Liao Chinese and the Khitan tombs dated to the late dynastic period.

In addition, much more emphasis has been given so far on the evidence of “sinicization” of the Khitans. The cultural influence or contribution from the Khitans to the Han Chinese is seldom discussed or maybe even purposely ignored. The evidence that the cultural influence sometimes traveled from the Khitans to the Liao Chinese does exist, despite its scarcity. The wife of a Chinese official, Geng Yanyi (d. 1020), who was

buried with a metal burial suit, is a good example of such case. Some of the mural paintings discovered in the Zhang family cemetery in Xuanhua, Hebei portray some of the family members wearing robes with an opening to the left that have been associated with the “barbarians” since the ancient times. Servants of both Han and Khitan ethnicity are also seen together offering food and drink to the tomb owners. Some of the tomb guardians depicted on the walls also wore a typical Khitan hairstyle that is characterized with a shaved top with the two sides left long.¹³³ These are important findings that afforded us a rare glimpse into the lives of the wealthy and influential Chinese under the foreign regime and the cultural exchange between the two ethnic groups. I hope that more future studies focus on the impact of such cultural contact, the cultural contributions made by the Khitans and their legacies in the subsequent dynasties of both the Han and foreign origins.

¹³³ Hsingyuan Tsao, *Differences preserved*, 15.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to provide a comprehensive overview of the lives of the Khitan aristocratic women of the Liao dynasty by investigating a variety of roles they assumed in the Liao society as de facto rulers, military commanders, tribal religious functionaries (shaman) and ritual experts in secular ceremonies. In order for us to understand their exceptionally active participation in public affairs, an analysis of the Khitan traditional social structure was necessary by focusing on the patterns of their marriages, their conceptions on kin, inheritance and succession practices. In addition, we investigated the burials belonging to the Khitan women, which provided us an invaluable opportunity to learn about their mortuary practices and conception of the afterlife.

Through the artifacts buried in the tombs, we could take a glimpse into their daily activities in the domestic sphere, their material culture and personal pursuits.

This study on the Khitan women's lives relied heavily on information obtained from two different kinds of sources; traditional Chinese histories and archaeological data.

By adopting the interdisciplinary approach, I intended to contemplate on and reconsider two well-established theories in Chinese history: women of the conquest dynasties founded by non-Chinese peoples from the north in general enjoyed greater political authority, higher social status, and more economic power than their counterparts in native Chinese dynasties. The second theory deals with the cultural phenomenon called *sinicization*. According to traditional Chinese scholarship, the ruling elites of the conquest dynasties became gradually assimilated to Chinese culture once they established

their empires in Chinese soil and adopted Chinese form of political organization and social institutions. Our observation of this cultural development was focused on the Khitan aristocratic women during the dynastic period.

When the term “aristocratic” is used in this study, it basically refers to the membership of the two ruling clans of the Liao dynasty; the imperial clan, the Yelü, and the Xiao clan, which had an exclusive claim to marry the members of the imperial clan indefinitely. The marriage alliance between these two clans, dated to pre-dynastic era, generated the most unusual characteristic of the Liao dynasty that all of the Liao empresses came from a single clan, the Xiao. Moreover, only the imperial sons born by the Xiao consorts were entitled to succeed the throne. On the other hand, the imperial daughters were given in marriage to the Xiao clansmen, who were often their maternal uncles or matrilineal cousins. The offspring of the Liao princesses were usually married back into the imperial clan. In addition to the exclusive marriage alliance, the Xiao clan secured key offices in the Liao central government through their hereditary privileges, which allowed them to completely dominate the Liao socio-political scene throughout the dynastic period.

The exclusive marriage exchange, combined with other hereditary political privileges bestowed on the Xiao clan, was initially devised to ensure the monopoly of power of two founding clans of the Liao dynasty by preventing outsiders, particularly the conquered subjects, from infiltrating into the ruling class. In order to sustain this system, the exalted statuses of the female members of both clans had to be protected along with those of the male members. In other words, women inherited their statuses and privileges

from their parents and passed them on to their offspring of both genders. We have examined the imperial edicts specifying that the Khitan officials born by concubines were discriminated against receiving appointments to a certain key positions and that a man's social status was to be determined according to that of his mother. Needless to say, such institutional protections of the prerogatives of women of two clans were responsible for creating the unique political environment in which not only the imperial consorts but also their daughters and even sisters actively participated in court politics and commanded a great authority.

In native Chinese dynasties, imperial consorts were normally given access to power under the circumstances of national emergency, such as the illness or sudden death of the reigning emperor when no mature heirs were available. The Liao empresses did not have to wait for the development of such conditions to exert their influence. Many of them had already been powerful and shared the authority of the ruler with their husbands during the lifetime of the latter. In the inner palace, the position of a Khitan empress was not threatened by other non-Xiao consorts of the emperor whose sons were automatically excluded from the imperial succession. In the court, she was supported by her clansmen who occupied key military and civil offices in the Liao cabinet. For this reason, unlike the Chinese empresses, the Liao empresses were not subject to the scrutiny of the bureaucrats, which granted them a considerable degree of freedom in their conduct. As a consequence, the authority of the Liao emperors, who were surrounded by the maternal clansmen at court and dominated by their Xiao mothers, was considerably weakened.

The Khitan tribal traditions allowed the Khitan women participate in various public affairs openly. When attending court sessions, the Khitan empresses did not follow the Chinese custom of sitting behind a hanging screen. Side by side with their husbands, they played an indispensable role in performing various important ceremonies in both secular and spiritual realms, such as worshipping the Khitan original ancestors and inaugurating annual hunting season, in which they participated riding on the horseback or driving a camel-drawn chariot. Perhaps the most extraordinary characteristic of theirs that set them far apart from their Chinese counterparts is their possession of martial qualities. From the perspective of the Chinese, military was strictly a male domain. In the Liao dynasty, not only did the Khitan empresses join the Khitan generals in coming up with military strategies but also personally commanded army in the battlefield as late as during the reign of Daozong. The Liaoshi describes many imperial consorts as excellent archers, hunters and horse riders. Participating in military was by no means restricted to the empresses, however, as we have seen in the case of Hulian, Empress Ruizhi's older sister.

Both historical and archaeological data strongly suggest that the Khitan elite women were not confined to their quarters and expected to pursue only sedentary activities. Hunting appears to have been a favorite pastime for women. A number of Khitan burials belonging to female occupants yielded a large quantity of equestrian equipment and riding boots. In rare cases, weapons were buried along with the horse-riding gear. There is no question that the Khitans borrowed greatly from the Chinese, particularly from the Tang, in terms of tomb construction and decoration. The discovery

of the typical Chinese decorative themes, such as four directional animals and the scenes of filial piety, in some Khitan tombs has been the basis of the argument of the historians and archaeologists that the Khitans, at least the aristocrats, were thoroughly assimilated by the Chinese cultural norms and moral values by the late dynastic period. In addition, the fact that the Liaoshi listed four Khitan elite women, who steadfastly upheld wifely virtues and decorum, in the chapter on Women of Exemplary conduct provides clear textual evidence that the Khitan women embraced the Confucian code of conduct, according to this argument.¹

Such “textual evidence” can be misleading, despite its apparent implications. The same source also states that a Liao princess entered a levirate union only a few decades prior to the fall of the dynasty. I am doubtful to accept the argument that the adoption of Chinese culture profoundly transformed the lives of the Khitans. I have not seen clear evidence that suggests that the Khitans entirely abandoned their traditional way of life in favor of that of the Chinese. Inside of the grand façade of the impressive subterranean multi-chambered burial complexes complete with domed ceilings and decorated inner walls, built in accordance with the Tang funerary architectural style, the Khitan aristocratic female occupants were discovered wearing death masks, metal netting suits and metal boots. Such funerary paraphernalia was found exclusively in the Khitan burials. The Liao Chinese and the Khitans continued to adhere to their own mortuary traditions late into the dynastic period. The differences were clearly visible in their burials. While the vast majority of the Liao Chinese preferred to cremate their dead in

¹ Guo Gangsong, “Lun Liaochao Qidanrende”, pp. 58.

accordance with their devotion to Buddhism. For some reason, the Khitans, devout Buddhists themselves, never embraced this practice enthusiastically. Instead, they often chose to inter their dead directly into the tombs without using coffins. The practice of sacrificing animals to accompany the dead also appears to have been continuously popular even in the late dynastic period.

To sum up, this dissertation is a comprehensive investigation of the Khitan aristocratic women in order to construct a fuller picture of their lives than what has been available so far. However, this study remained a preliminary research that left us with more questions than answers about the Khitan women. I hope that the future studies explore other aspects of their lives that have been excluded here, such as their religious devotion, particularly their patronage to Buddhism, the traditional Khitan diet and attire. Moreover, this study called for the necessity of reconsidering the issue of “cultural assimilation” in Chinese history. Instead of emphasizing the Khitan adoption of the Chinese culture only, we can attempt to look for the evidence that suggests to the contrary for a change. This will certainly provide a new outlook on how we perceive the relationships and interactions between different ethnic groups in the history of conquest dynasties.

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