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RESEARCH ARTICLE

What keeps the Kitans enigmatic: Roots of the ethnic narrative in Liao historiography

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Abstract

Since 1930s scholarship, the historiography of Kitan Liao has increasingly interpreted ethnicity as a factor in polity and policy, an interpretation that has depended upon retrospective constructions of Liao and Jin by, largely, the Qing imperial court of the eighteenth century. Archaeological evidence now demonstrates that the documentation itself was fragmentary and in all likelihood unrepresentative of the identity concepts that prevailed at various class strata of the Kitan Liao empire. On the ground, prominent aristocrats, including many from the lineage of Han Derang (or the Han of Jizhou), are shown to be derived from the status and wealth of each man in his own time. Identities drawn from ancestry, language, place of origin, or folk customs were characteristic of dependent populations, not of aristocrats. Stratified identities, by horizontal rank and not partitioned vertically by imputed ethnicity, appear to be evident in many histories of northeast Asian regimes from Northern Wei to the very early Qing. They were characterized by a continuous cultural tradition with complex elements, consistent among them reading and writing multiple languages and literatures, horse training and hunting pastimes, and shamanic religious and political practices. Because these elements are associated in modern discourse with distinct language and cultural traditions, this aristocratic culture tends to be seen as variegated and 'cosmopolitan' rather than as coherent and continuous.

Keywords: Kitan; Liao; ethnicity; aristocracy; Han Derang

Introduction

Among dynastic powers based in China,[1] the Kitan (Khitan) Liao empire (907–1125)[2] is perhaps foremost to be associated with the term 'cosmopolitan', while its politically dominant group, the Kitans, have been regarded as culturally enigmatic. In tenth- and

[1]'China' here means the lands dominated by agricultural, Chinese-speaking populations from the Neolithic to the Song period, and 'Chinese' means the populations speaking Chinese as a first language and participating in China's dominant culture. This is not intended to correspond to the borders of any particular political regime in any period, including the present.

[2]Song period commentary, much of it later collated in the Yuan period history of Liao, *Liao shi*, indicates that the original state name was (in Chinese, modern pronunciation) Da Qidan 大契丹, and that

eleventh-century East Asia, travel by elites, written records of contact with contrasting societies, illustrations, art, and architecture contributed to mundane cross-cultural contact—what Nicholas Tackett has called 'cosmopolitan sociability'[3]—on the part of Song literati, in particular. But the assumption that the Liao empire was cosmopolitan at its core, since men of Chinese descent seemed to be influencing or controlling policies of the Kitan imperial court, dates from much earlier. This understanding of Liao as consisting of a patchwork of 'Kitan', 'Uighur',[4] 'Chinese,' and other cultures, languages, and influences dates to the Song period, and has had various imbrications over the centuries. At root it depends upon accepting the detection of ethnic consciousness in medieval history.[5] In the case of English-language historiography of China generally and Liao in particular, this concept of ethnicity[6] has been not only fundamental to, but has been institutionalized by, our understanding of Kitan Liao documents. In the twenty-first century, insights from archaeology, in contrast to the conventions of historiography, have illuminated the extent to which the 'ethnicity' of Liao elites has been constructed and imposed by historians external to the Kitan order, whether in space or time.

Narratives of imperial China's history have not always identified ethnicity as a primary cause or effect of historical change from early times, nor was 'ethnic' used to

official usage changed to Da Liao 大遼 sometime around 938 (the time of the incorporation of the Sixteen Counties). The reason that 'Liao' in particular was chosen (perhaps as a calque of Kitan *ulji*, and perhaps a river name) is still a matter of speculation. As indicated in some non-*Liao shi* sources and in epigraphy, in 983 the state name was changed back to Da Qidan, and in 1066 Da Liao became favoured again. For more than half of the entire dynastic period, then, the state announced itself to the Sinolexic world as Da Liao. Wittfogel and Feng argued that the inconsistencies are best resolved if historians use Liao as a convention, while being aware that this was not always the state name: K. A. Wittfogel and Feng Cha-Sheng et al., *History of Chinese society: Liao* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1949), p. 38. Daniel Kane has pointed out that epigraphic evidence suggests that in Kitan these name changes were reflected less in the words used but more in the order in which they were used; see Daniel Kane, 'The great central Liao Kitan state', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, vol. 43, 2013, pp. 27–50; Liu Pujiang 劉浦江, 'Liaochao guohao kaoshi 遼朝國號考釋', *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 6, 2001, pp. 30–44, reprinted in Liu Pujiang, *Songmo zhi jian—Liao Jin Qidan Nüzhen shi yanjiu* 松漠之間—遼金契丹女真史研究 (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 2009), pp. 27–51.

[3]Nicholas Tackett, *The origins of the Chinese nation: Song China and the forging of an East Asian world order* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 45.

[4]In this article 'Uighur' refers to the medieval empire, its language and culture, not to the modern population (now usually spelled 'Uyghur') of Xinjiang province, China.

[5]This chronological term is not used as a way of universalizing European history, but as a reference to a complex of changes affecting Eurasia between about the six and sixteenth centuries. See also Pamela Crossley, 'Chronological Eurasia', in her *Hammer and anvil: Nomad rulers at the forge of the modern world* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), pp. 4–6.

[6]'Ethnicity', as used by historians, may rest on casual assumptions regarding its self-evidently objective nature. I have previously explored the related developments of 'ethnic' concepts, ethnology, 'ethnic groups', *minzu* 民族, and *shaoshu minzu* 少數民族, including the modern imputation of descent, genetic identity, and race, to terms that originally related to other characteristics (including class and cooperation). See Pamela Crossley, 'Thinking about ethnicity in early modern China', *Late Imperial China*, vol. 11, no. 2, June 1990, pp. 1–36, esp. pp. 12–17. See also Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation', in *Nation and narration*, (ed.) Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 291–322; Michael Banton, *Racial and ethnic competition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and M. Banton, 'The idiom of race: A critique of presentism', *Research in race and ethnic relations*, (eds) C. B. Marett and C. Leggon (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1980).

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describe cultural variations within populations. There was a turning point during the 1930s and 1940s, when Chinese historiography—recalling Sun Yatsen's speeches of the 1890s and heavily influenced by nationalist historiography of the generation of Xiao Yishan 蕭一山 (1902–1978)—characterized the Taiping movement (1847–1866) as an ethnic movement. This was disputed by historians who insisted that class struggle was the only primary engine for historical change.[7] Some invoked an idea of ethnic solidarity consistent with or drawn from Max Weber (1864–1920), who described ethnic groups as vehicles for 'social action'.[8] This would not be properly described as an instrumental ethnic grouping, as Weber was very clear about the affective quotient. But Weber's and similar interpretations imbued ethnic grouping with a transitive quality—it led from something and to something else. The Taiping ethnic argument established in the historiography of modern China the proposition that ethnic sentiments were themselves sufficient to ignite social movements and political conflict. They were not only a cause, but an end in themselves—one could say the model was intransitive. *Chinese society: Liao* by Karl Wittfogel (1896–1988) and Chia-sheng Feng (馮家昇, 1904–1970) was published in 1949 by the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. It was a translation (the work of Feng) of a large portion of *Liao shi* 遼史, supplemented by annotation and commentary from Wittfogel, Feng, and their collaborators.[9] The authors were particularly interested in the figure of Han Derang

[7]Nationalist historians such as Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990) and Jen Yu-wen 簡又文 (Jian Youwen, 1896–1978) were early champions of the idea that ethnicity (and hatred of Manchus) itself, rather than religious fervour and competition for well-being, fuelled the movement. The ethnic revolution argument was opposed by historians such as Peng Zeyi 彭澤益 (1916–1994) and Luo Ergang 羅爾綱 (1901–1997), who both argued the causes were social and economic, and that ethnic affiliations worked as organizing and legitimating dynamics or merely as a confusing rhetorical veneer. But a majority of historians recognized that in the Taiping case, as in many others, doctrinal and ostensibly ethnic motivations were frequently conflated. See Philip A. Kuhn, 'Origins of the Taiping vision: Cross-cultural dimensions of a Chinese rebellion', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 19, no. 3, July 1977, pp. 350–366; Vincent Yu-chung Shih, 'Interpretations of the Taiping Tien-Kuo by noncommunist Chinese writers', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 3, May 1951, pp. 248–257. For pushing of the ethnic paradigm to the pre-Taiping period, see Donald J. Sutton examining what he calls the 'myth' of ethnic rebellion in relation to the Miao: Donald J. Sutton, 'Ethnic revolt in the Qing empire: The "Miao uprising" of 1795–1797 reexamined', *Asia Major*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2003, pp. 105–152.

[8]I would suggest that Weber's description of an ethnic group as individuals with a subjective belief in their common descent was intended as a reference to the organization for social or political assertion in real time, while 'ethnicity' (a word Weber did not use) when used by historians tends to retrospectively reify actions and expressions as an ostensibly objective phenomenon with causative implications. For Weber's incorporation of ethnic groups into his larger theory, see Max Weber, *Theory of social and economic organisation*, (trans.) A. M. Henderson and (ed.) Talcott Parsons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947); Elke Winter, 'On Max Weber and ethnicity in times of intellectual decolonisation', *Cambio. Rivista sulle trasformazioni sociali*, vol. 10, no. 20, 2020, pp. 41–52; Maurice Jackson, 'An analysis of Max Weber's theory of ethnicity', *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1982, pp. 4–18.

[9]John de Francis (1911–2009) had a career teaching Chinese language and literature at leading American universities before being blacklisted in 1954, before returning to teaching in 1961; Esther S. Goldfrank (1896–1997) was a distinguished anthropologist specializing in Native American cultures (sometimes in collaboration with Ruth Benedict) who married Wittfogel in 1950; Lea Kisselgoff (1909–1997) was a specialist in classical Chinese whose obituary in the *New York Times* centrally cited her work on *History of Chinese society: Liao*; and Karl H. Menges (1908–1999), who escaped Germany in 1936 after being questioned by the Gestapo, and was subsequently based at Columbia University, became America's leading specialist in Turkic languages and possibly its most influential champion of the Altaic hypothesis.

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韓德讓/Yelü Longyun 耶律隆运, 941–1011), a man of Chinese descent who rose to be the most powerful single individual in Liao history. Wittfogel and Feng considered the Han lineage, which is mentioned earliest at Jizhou 薊州 (Yütian 玉田) in the vicinity of modern Tianjin, to be exemplary of a subset of the Chinese population in Kitan territory.[10] In this way the Wittfogel and Feng treatment of the Han of Jizhou became a pillar of modern academic reification of 'ethnicity' in pre-modern history. The book's role in fixing a historicization of medieval and ancient ethnography was much broader, as Ralph Linton found it so authoritative that he cited *History of Chinese society: Liao* even before its publication.[11] This use of the Han of Jizhou as a fundament in formulations of ethnicity was related in more than accidental ways to the 'Altaic' theories clearly influencing not only Wittfogel but also his collaborator in the volume, Karl Menges,[12] and to Altaicists' tendency to ascribe essential cultural aspects to ancient and medieval identities.

Song narratives and the objectification of *han* 漢

The earliest and, in indirect ways, the most influential Song period accounts of Kitan Liao were included in *Jiu wudai shi* 舊五代史[13] and *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史,[14] each of which narrated the founding of the Kitan state. The latter in particular was one of the sources of *Qidan guozhi* 契丹國志, the best known Song period record of Kitan Liao, attributed to Ye Yongli 葉隆禮 (fl. 1247–1260)[15] who wrote it at the instruction of

[10]For a more detailed discussion of the lineage as 'Han of Jizhou', see Pamela Crossley, 'Outside in: Power, identity, and the Han lineage of Jizhou', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, vol. 43, 2013, pp. 51–89. I think the most common cognate of this phrase in Chinese historiography today would be 'Han Zhigu *jiazu*' 韓知古家族; this creates a problem, discussed below.

[11]See the important discussion (to which this article will repeatedly return) in Julia Schneider, 'The Jin revisited: New assessment of Jurchen emperors', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, vol. 41, 2011, pp. 343–404, esp. p. 343, n. 7.

[12]The Altaic language family hypothesis was inspired by the affirmed scientific hypothesis of the 'Indo-European' language family, first formed in the early seventeenth century. Like the Indo-European hypothesis, the Altaic hypothesis postulated an original population of speakers, who afterwards diffused to various locations, taking their ancestry with them. Ultimately the Altaic hypothesis has failed to fulfil the criteria for a language family, but romanticizing, essentializing, and racializing inspired by it continues. It is worth noting that an early critic of the Altaic hypothesis, Gerard L. M. Clauson (1891–1974), expressed particular scepticism regarding its essentializing of a hypothetical Turkish race. See Gerard L. M. Clauson, 'The case against the Altaic theory', *Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1956, pp. 181–187, esp. p. 186. On the role of German philology of Asian languages and the disruption of European universalism (through the introduction of a kind of counter-essentialization), see Suzanne Marchand, 'German Orientalism and the decline of the West', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 145, no. 4, December 2001, pp. 465–473. For an illuminating case study of how ethnolinguistic myth-making—both Altaic and autochthonous—can overwhelm archaeological interpretation, see Hyung-Il Pai, *Constructing Korean 'origins': A critical review of archaeology, historiography, and racial myth in Korean state-formation theories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2000).

[13]*Jiu wudai shi* 舊五代史 was compiled by Xue Juzheng 薛居正 (912–981) and others. It was originally titled *Wudai shiji* 五代史記.

[14]*Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩 was published after his death in 1073. Like *Jiu wudai shi*, this compilation was originally titled *Wudai shiji* 五代史記.

[15]Apart from his authorship of *Qidan guozhi* and his academic degree of 1247 Ye Yongli is not otherwise known to history. There is incidental information relating to his appointments, and possibly an epigraphic signature, for the dates in the late Lizong reign.

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the Song emperor Lizong 理宗 (Zhao Yun 趙昀, reigned 1224–1264). *Qidan guozhi* was composed about a century-and-a-half after the death of Han Derang, and incorporated passages from several significant Song state documents as well as evident summaries of commentary from Song records, supplemented by reports of travellers between Song and Kitan Liao. Han Derang is mentioned over 30 times (frequently posthumously), with his career described in detail and his character in some vivid ways. A century after Ye Longli, the Yuan imperial court in China commissioned *Liao shi.*[16] It is conventionally attributed to the editorship of Toqtogha (Tuotuo 脱脱, 1314–1356), who was a sort of series manager for *Liao shi, Jin shi* 金史, and *Song shi* 宋史.[17] Like most of the compilations in the series, the production was expeditious; *Liao shi* was compiled over the period 1343–1344.

The term *hanren* 漢人 is richly attested and deeply investigated in medieval Chinese histories;[18] in *Liao shi, hanmin* 漢民 is also commonly used.[19] Most often, it referred to persons abducted, captured, conquered, or enticed from China to border regimes. *Qidan guozhi* recounts a dialogue between the Kitan ruler Yelü Deguang 耶律德光 (902–927, Emperor Taizong) and his mother, in which she asks whether a *hanren* can ever rule over the *hu* 胡 (here, the Kitans), which the emperor rejects as impossible.[20] Later the text moves to Han Derang, who appears to Song readers to be, in fact, a *han* ruling over the *hu*, and Ye Longli comments: 'He managed national affairs with wisdom and far-sightedness, and it was his habit to guard the imperial fortunes 智略决国事, 雅重隆运.'[21] Ye also claims that Derang's brothers and their sons eventually rose to numerous prominent positions on account of Derang's merit. But Ye's admiration for

[16]*Liao shi* 遼史, *Dianjiaoben ershisishi xiudingben* 點校本二十四史修訂本, 5 vols (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016). The 2016 edition, under the direction of Liu Pujiang (劉浦江, 1964–2015), corrects the 1974 edition and adds very substantial annotation. See also Pierre Marsone, 'Review of *Dianjiaoben ershisishi xiudingben*', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, vol. 48, 2019, pp. 301–308.

[17]Annalistic and biographical writing of the Kitan state began in the Liao period but little of it was incorporated into *Liao shi* as written in the Yuan period. See Liu Pujiang (posthumous translation and publication), 'The founding year of the Khitan dynasty: A textual investigation based on primary sources', *Journal of Chinese Humanities*, vol. 9, 2023, pp. 3–23; Hok-lam Chan, 'Chinese official historiographies at the Yuan court: The composition of the Liao, Chin, and Sung histories', in *China under Mongol Rule*, (ed.) John D. Langlois (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 56–107; and Schneider, 'The Jin revisited'. On the Toluid agenda in 'Secret History' and the imperial histories, see Crossley, *Hammer and anvil*, pp. 286–288.

[18]See, among others, Patricia Ebrey, 'Rethinking Han Chinese identity', *China Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, May 2023, pp. 57–86; Mark C. Elliott, '*Hushuo* 胡說: The northern Other and the naming of the Han Chinese', in *Critical Han studies*, (eds) Thomas Mullaney, James Patrick Leibold, Stéphane Gros and Eric Armand Vanden Bussche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 173–190, stresses the importance of *han* as an identity of Chinese outside of China; Shao-yun Yang, *The way of the barbarians: Redrawing ethnic boundaries in Tang and Song China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019). See also Naomi Standen, 'Integration and separation: The framing of the Liao dynasty (907—1125) in Chinese sources', *Asia Major*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2011, pp. 147–198; Hang Lin, 'Political reality and cultural superiority: Song China's attitude toward the Khitan Liao', *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum*, vol. 71, no. 4, 2018, pp. 385–406; Naran Bilik, 'Names have memories', *Inner Asia*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2007, pp. 27–29.

[19]*Liao shi juan* 2, 6, 16, 19, 37, 38, 39, 60.

[20]*Qidan guozhi juan* 3. 遼連歲入侵, 中國疲於奔命, 邊民塗地; 人畜多死, 國人厭苦之。述律太后謂帝曰: 「使漢人為胡主, 可乎?」曰: 「不可。」太后曰: 「然則汝何故欲為漢帝?」曰: 「石氏負恩, 不可容。」後曰: 「汝今雖得漢地, 不能居也; 萬一蹉跌, 悔所不及。」又謂群下曰: 「漢兒何得一餉眠？自古但聞漢和番, 不聞番和漢。漢兒果能回意, 我亦何惜與和。」

[21]*Qidan guozhi juan* 18.

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Derang was grudging. Song literati referred to the Kitan people as 'northern slaves' (*beilu* 北虜) and to Chinese civil servant populations in Kitan Liao—*hanren*—both as traitors to Song and as the explanation for the success and relative longevity of the Kitan Liao empire.[22] Song commentary on Liao, certainly, brooked no ambiguities in the identities and proper affiliations of the population of men of Chinese descent filling various roles in the Kitan Liao regime.

As many authors have already demonstrated, *han* was particularly difficult to define before the eighteenth century, in the sense that what was signified could be fluid. But the evidence indicates that the term's earlier connotations were primarily political, not ethnic in a twentieth-century sense. States forming in the third century and later, both in China and in northern Asia, were frequently eager to invoke the prestige of the defunct Han 漢 empire (203 BCE–220 CE). That prestige had rested upon the radically innovative institution of emperorship—introduced as the means of unified rule in China by the Qin empire in 221 BCE and subsequently adapted in the Han as the basic state scheme. Emperorship was explicitly opposed to the traditions of aristocratic and collegial rule that had been ubiquitous across Bronze Age Eurasia and codified in the political texts of Zhou period China (*circa* 1050–256 BCE); the Han dynastic founders had devised a stable mix of Confucian rhetoric with imperial institutions, reducing aristocratic rule to an ethical abstraction. Later states attempting to invoke Han prestige by replicating the institutional terms of the Han empire—most important, 'emperor' (*huangdi* 皇帝)—frequently endured prolonged tension between rulers attempting to aggregate power in their own hands (or at least in the imperial persona they were attempting to construct) and aristocrats attempting to preserve their own power and privilege. One of the landmarks in this history of imperial counterweight to entrenched aristocracies was the *Zhenguan Zhengyao* 貞觀政要 compiled by Wu Jing 武競 (670–749).[23] It contains a dialogue from a tumultuous early period of the Tang empire. Li Shimin 李世民 (598–649, Tang Taizong 太宗) is portrayed as eager to create a political utopia in which an emperor rules with the harmonious assistance of his aristocracy and uses 'high ministers from the *han* families' (*han jia zaixiang* 漢家宰相) who 'know the political system' (*zhi zhengti* 識政體) to consult the histories and the laws to legitimate the emperor's policies.[24] The work was translated into Kitan large characters in 1046–1047, which made it accessible later to Jurchen readers after the demise of the Kitan state. It was also well known in Korea and Japan.

This political contestation had several cultural dimensions. The Han imperial institution required a law code and the education of bureaucrats who would act on behalf

[22]Sun Hao, 'Studies on the Khitan Liao from the perspective of inner Asian history: Review essay', *Eurasian Studies: English edition VI*, (eds) Yu Taishan and Li Jinxiu (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 394–410, esp. p. 396.

[23]Fragments of a Tangut translation survive in St Petersburg. See also Zhou Feng 周峰, 'Zhenguan zhengyao zai Liao, Xixia, Jin, Yuan sichao 貞觀政要在遼、西夏、金、元四朝', *Beifang wenwu* 北方文物, vol. 1, 2009, pp. 75–78. I am indebted to my reviewer for pointing this out that this work was also translated into Kitan.

[24]*Zhenguan zhengyao juan* 1 貞觀二年, 太宗問黃門侍郎王珪曰: ⌈近代君臣治國, 多劣於前古, 何也 ? ⌋對曰: ⌈古之帝王為政, 皆志尚清靜, 以百姓之心為心。近代則唯損百姓以適其欲, 所任用大臣, 復非經術之士。漢家宰相, 無不精通一經, 朝廷若有疑事, 皆引經決定, 由是人識禮教, 治致太平。近代重武輕儒, 或參以法律, 儒行既虧, 淳風大壞。⌋太宗深然其言。自此百官中有學業優長, 兼識政體者, 多進其階品, 累加遷擢焉。

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of the emperor, and in both instances this generally meant extensive importation of the Han law code, in Chinese (since at the time none of the Eastern Eurasian societies had their own writing systems), which in turn entailed male elite education in Chinese history and philosophy. 'Han' is repeatedly attested in the *Wei shu* 魏書[25] as a reference to the cultural space that the Han empire had once occupied, as well as to both individuals and populations (*hanren*) with a connection to it, though the same space and the populations were part of the Northern Wei (386–535) domain.[26] But 'decorum of the Han officials' (*hanguan weiyi* 漢官威儀)[27] entailed the dress, music, rituals, and processionals used by Han period officials that had been committed to writing in the Later Han period; the handbook (*hanguan yi* 漢官儀) survived in fragmentary form, and in Sui and Tang times was collated, together with substantial annotation, as a guide to proper court behaviour. The practice of attempting to replicate Han court behaviour and dress continued to be described in imperial records as *hanguan weiyi* (or *hanguan zhi weiyi* 漢官之威儀) and always referred to the legitimating effect of Han protocols, not to officials of any particular ancestral group. In this sense it appears in the records of the Xixia (1038–1227), Yuan (1271–1368), and Ming (1368–1644)—the last an unusual use by a Chinese dynasty, but a clear reference to the restoration of Han-style imperial civil rule after the interlude of Mongol domination.[28] In several regimes, including Northern Wei, Tang (618–906), and Jurchen Jin (1121–1234), debates at court by champions of the aristocratic collegial traditions against the imperial institutions were persistent and occasionally overt, and in such environments it was common for officials acting as part of the imperial power structure to be denominated as *han*—a direct reference to their political associations, but most likely in their own time accompanied by use of Chinese script, familiarity with Chinese texts, wearing of Chinese official clothing, performance of Chinese palace and court rituals, and, most frequently but not universally actual, Chinese descent.[29] In *Liao shi*, Han official dress, ranks, and ritual procession are referred to as *hanfa* 漢法.[30] This has tempted modern scholars to assume that the cultural cleavages must somehow have been primary and the political secondary, but the documents through which we know these episodes suggest

[25]Compiled in the early 550s by Wei Shou 魏收 (506–572).

[26]As examples, see *Wei shu juan* 40 (列傳 23, (崔) 浩曰:「漢書地理志稱: 『涼州之畜, 為天下饒。』若無水草, 何以畜牧？又漢人為居, 終不於水草之地築城郭, 立郡縣也。又雪之消液, 絕不斂塵, 何得通渠引曹, 溉灌數百萬頃乎 ？此言大抵誣於人矣; *juan* 42 (列傳 25, 天興五年, 休之為司馬德宗平西將軍、荊州刺史。為桓玄逼逐, 遂奔慕容德。劉裕誅玄後, 還建鄴, 裕復以休之為荊州刺史。休之頗得江漢人心, 劉裕疑其有異志; *Juan* 130 (志第二十, 自今以後, 敢有事胡神及造形像泥人、銅人者, 門誅。雖言胡神, 問今胡人, 共雲無有。皆是前世漢人無賴子弟劉元真、呂伯強之徒, 乞胡之誕言, 用老莊之虛假, 附而益之, 皆非真實。

[27]The *locus classicus* appears to be 不圖今日復見漢官威儀, Guangwu's exclamation at seeing Han official dress, hairstyles, and walking order restored to the court after the Wang Mang interregnum. See *Houhan shu* 後漢書, first annal of Guangwu (光武帝紀上).

[28]Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–1381), *Shang yu zhongyuan* 諭中原檄 (1367).

[29]For instance, the 'Han officials' section of the *Sui shu* ('On classics' 經籍志) is clearly not a reference to officials of putative Chinese descent, but contains lists and regulations on ranks, numbers of appointments, and time needed to travel from various localities to Luoyang. A similar phrase 'old decorum of Han' (*han jiu yi* 漢舊儀) appearing later in the same chapter also has nothing to do with individuals called *han* but instead brings forward Later Han material related to court dress, etiquette, and music.

[30]*Liao shi juan* 56, 61, 64, 180.

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that political and cultural could not be distilled in these contexts, and that political concerns were the most direct and explicit.

As *Zhenguan zhengyao* had prescribed, *han* were valued for their usefulness.[31] Across a swathe of eastern Mongolia and Manchuria before the sixteenth century, *han* was also a term for a servant or a dependent, and a series of verbs related to the Tungusic cognate (or loan) of *han* meant to support, to wait on, to be attendant upon.[32] Wang Zhonghan has noted that late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Jurchen and Manchu usage tended to occur in the context of the menial tasks performed by the Sinophone workers in medicine and food preparation, agriculture, horse care, and estate management.[33] This was evidently echoed in the modern period and accords with Lattimore's comment that 'both *Khitat*, the Mongol name for the Chinese, and *Nikan*, the Manchu name, have the vernacular connotation of "slave"'.[34] This history of pejoratively associating terms for people migrating or abducted from China as servile can be dated at least as early as the Kitan; they can be assumed to go much earlier.[35] Such folk connotations were reflected in the administrative terminology of the early Kitan state period. *Han'er*[36]—with the diminutive *er* 兒 appended—was the term for dependent Sinophone doctors, secretaries, interpreters, cartographers, architects, engineers, farmers, animal raisers and renderers, miners, fireworks experts, and others, most but not all of them impressed during the Kitan acquisition of the Sixteen Counties area of modern Tianjin and Beijing. In a passage from the *Qidan guozhi* previously cited here, the empress dowager asks why Yelü Deguang would himself wish to rule over *han* (literally as a 'Han emperor' *handi* 漢帝, in the style described above) and he responds to assembled courtiers, 'Why do I provide the *han'er* with food and shelter? Because since ancient times I have heard of *han* assimilating (*he* 和) *fan* (foreigners), not of *fan* assimilating *han*. Because they will remember this, and know that I too am able to cherish them and assimilate them. 漢兒何得一餉眠？自古但聞漢和番，不聞番和漢。漢兒果能回意, 我亦何惜與和'.[37]

[31]This pattern was effectively summarized, using Liao as an example, in Jin Yufu 金毓黻 (1887–1962), 'Abaoji liyong zhi han ren 阿保機利用之漢人', in *Song Liao Jin shi* 宋遼金時 (Taipei: Hongshi chubanshe, 1974), pp. 202–222.

[32]See Alexander Vovin, 'Four Tungusic etymologies', in *Philology of the grasslands: Essays in Mongolic, Turkic and Tungusic studies*, (ed.) Bela Kempf (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2018), pp. 366–368.

[33]Wang Zhonghan 王鍾翰, citing Aisin Gioro Yigeng 愛新覺羅奕賡, notes the glossing of *nikan* with 漢子 (not 人) and 蛮子家, suggesting the element of servility or dependency in the meaning. 'Qingdai Baqi zhongde Man Han minzu chengfen wenti 清代八旗中的滿汉民族成分问题', *Wang Zhonghan Qingshi lunji* 王钟翰清史论集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), pp. 145–151, esp. p. 175. See also Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo* (Paris: Adrienne-Maisonneuve, 1959), p. 378.

[34]Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian frontiers of China* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1940), p. 123.

[35]Wu Gui 武珪, a Kitan Liao official, defected from Song in the later eleventh century; in *Miscellaneous notes on the lands north of Yan* (*Yanbei Zaji* 燕北雜記), a source for Ye Longli's *Qidan guozhi*. This intertwining of implied servility with cultural labels is not exclusive in East Asia to *han*. See Christopher Atwood, 'The Qai, the Khongai, and the names of the Xiōngnú', Department of East Asian Languages and Civilisations, University of Pennsylvania Repository, 2015, p. 38: https://repository.upenn.edu/handle/20.500.14332/27741, [accessed 17 June 2024].

[36]Elliott, '*Hushuo*', pp. 183–187, finds *han'er* dates as early as Northern Wei, when it was used with respect to captured Chinese speakers who had formerly resided in Han empire territories.

[37]*Qidan guozhi juan* 3.

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In *Chinese society: Liao*, the Han lineage of Jizhou is acknowledged as a distinct subset of *han*. As a group, the family presented to Wittfogel and Feng the idea of a hybrid 'third culture'[38] of *han* with knowledge of Kitan culture and the trust of the Kitan court. In print Wittfogel noted this difference first in the Han lineage's lack of connection with the Kitan Liao examination system, which was regularly administered from 988 onwards; bureaucratic function and scholarly qualification were definitive of *han* who were not domestic or agricultural servants, but the Han of Jizhou were largely not participating.[39] The Han lineage from Jizhou contrasted with someone such as the high official who had been Ye Longli's original model *han*, Han Yanhui 韓延徽 (882–959), or to Shi Fang 室昉 (920–964), a Sixteen Counties[40] native (and author of an early Liao annalistic work) who was perfectly familiar with Kitan state practices and culture, while remaining recognizably Chinese in the records.[41] This 'third culture' idea of hybridity would prove extremely influential in English-language historiography of China and Inner Asia.[42]

Historicization of Liao and Jin imperial nativism

The question of whether or not consciousness of and personal commitment to an enduring cultural identity was a primary cause of institutional and political change

[38]One might note that 'third culture' formulations had currency in the 1940s through to the 1960s. I would suggest this was a predictable response to fieldwork coming up against essentialized dichotomies that permeated the social sciences. See particularly Bruno Malinowski's suggestion of a 'third cultural reality' in South Africa between the White and Black binary—indirectly analogized from his experience of growing up bilingual in Polish and French— rooted both in the countryside and in the city. See Michael Young, *Malinowski: Odyssey of an anthropologist, 1884–1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Post-colonial societies were, from the 1950s, found to sprout 'third cultures' of locals who had grown equally familiar with the cultures of their parents and the cultures of the colonialists. See David C. Pollock and Ruth van Reken, *Third culture kids: The experience of growing up among worlds* (London: Intercultural Press, 2001). After 1950 'third culture' enthusiasm was a byproduct of C. P. Snow's dichotomy of 'science' and 'traditional culture' (established in his Rede Lectures of 1959), which inspired a long list of models, ideations, and journals in the 1960s and 1970s. See also Paul Rabinow, *Essays on the anthropology of reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 153–161.

[39]Karl A. Wittfogel, 'Public office in the Liao dynasty and the Chinese examination system', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, June 1947, pp. 13–40, esp. pp. 34–35.

[40]The 'Sixteen Counties of Yan and Yun' (燕云十六州) were former Tang territories encompassing current-day Beijing and Tianjin. At the dissolution of the Song empire in 907, the counties came under the control of the Later Liang regime, until a coup of 923 made them subject to Later Tang. The Kitan ruler in 938 agreed to support a further coup within Later Tang and demanded the Sixteen Counties as a reward. The event brought a population of perhaps 2.5 to 3 million Chinese-speaking subjects under the control of the Kitan empire, at a time when the number of Kitans was probably well under a million, and constituted the only major holding of Kitan south of the Great Wall. For further discussion of the Sixteen Counties' impact on Kitan imperial population and structure, see Pamela Crossley, 'Bohai/Balhae identity and the coherence of Dan gur under the Kitan/Liao empire', *International Journal of Korean History*, vol. 21, no. 1, February 2016, pp. 11–45, esp. pp. 19–20. On Shi Fang and Liao annals, see Liu, 'The founding year of the Khitan dynasty', pp. 5–6.

[41]*Liao shi juan* 79. In Wittfogel, 'Public office', Han Derang and Shi Fang are treated as two examples of the *han* ethnic population.

[42]See also Jonathan Hay's interesting comments on the relationship between Wittfogel and Feng's 'third culture' and Homi Babha's 'third space'—both ways of historicizing apparently stable interstitials between ostensibly stable cultural oppositions. Jonathan Hay, 'Toward a theory of the intercultural', *Res: Anthropology and aesthetics*, vol. 35, 1999, pp. 5–9.

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in the medieval period is complex. Subordinate but distinct is the question of whether preservation of a native identity was a policy issue in Kitan Liao. An imposition of ethnicity upon Liao-period identities has a respectable pedigree in *Xin Wudai shi, Qidan guozhi*, and *Liao shi*, whose authors had a particular view from the Song documents of *han* serving in enemy regimes, and were not receptive to the idea that Chinese cultural identity could prove ephemeral against the charms of another civilization's power, wealth, status, companionship, and comforts.[43] Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), who argued that *hu* were unlikely to respect or assimilate to Chinese civilization, provided one of the most vivid illustrations of Abaoji's nativism: 'I know Chinese, but I never speak it among the tribes, because I fear they will imitate the Chinese and become cowardly.'[44]

The question extends to Jurchen Jin because of the way that Jin imperial history was used by historians to establish a case for nativisim in both the Kitan Liao and Jurchen Jin courts. Wittfogel and Feng interpreted the apparent change of dynastic name from Da Liao back to Da Qidan as a nativist reaction to the prospect of Chinese surnames, dress, and customs.[45] They (more importantly, Feng) reinforced the practice of reading Kitan Liao history through the lens of Jin history, particularly the Jin emperor Shizong 世宗 (Wanyan Yong, 完顏雍, or Ulu 烏祿, 1123–1189), whom they portrayed as fomenting a 'nativist' movement himself. Before *Chinese Society* this idea was firmly embedded in Japanese historiography in the 1930s through the work of Mikami Tsugio 三上次男 (1907—1987), and had become part of Chinese historiographical lore thanks to its amplification by Mikami's student Jin (Aisingioro) Qicong 金啟孮 (1918–2004), as well as Yao Congwu 姚從吾 (1894–1970) and Feng Chia-sheng himself. Since the 1930s, Chinese historiography seems to have taken for granted that there is some evidence in the *Jin shi* that Jin Shizong imposed revivalist policies upon the language, religion, professions, marriage prescriptions, or local habitation of Jurchens in China.[46] After

[43]On Song particularism, see Zhaoguang Ge, *Here in 'China' I dwell: Reconstructing historical discourses of China for our time* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2017), pp. 29–52, esp. pp. 31–43 on Ouyang Xiu. See also Zhao Dunhua, 'A defense of universalism: With a critique of particularism in Chinese culture', *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2009, pp. 116–129; Peter K. Bol, *'This culture of ours': Intellectual transitions in Tang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1992); Yang, *The way of the barbarians*, esp. pp. 3–23. On the other hand, an interesting study considers how an incident with complex political overtones (paralleling those attached to the Jurchen emperor Jin Shizong) has been flattened by historians who use it as a culturalist parable: see Isaac Yue, 'Treason by bilingualism? Xenophobia, clique, and the impeachment of Yu Jing', *Sinologia Hispanica*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2019, pp. 139–152.

[44]*Xin Wudai shi juan* 72.「吾能漢語, 然絕口不道於部人, 懼其效漢而怯弱也。」因戒坤曰:「爾當先歸, 吾以甲馬三萬會新天子幽、鎮之間, 共為盟約, 與我幽州, 則不復侵汝矣。」

[45]Wittfogel and Feng, *History of Chinese society: Liao*, pp. 307 ff.

[46]The pervasiveness of the assumption that Jin Shizong was a cultural revivalist is suggested by Ho Ping-ti, 'A rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski's "Reenvisioning the Qing"', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 57, no. 1, February 1998, pp. 123–155, where he cites Mikami's leading student Jin (Aisingioro) Qicong, 'Jurchen literature under the Chin', in *China under Jurchen rule: Essays on Chin intellectual and cultural history*, (eds) Hoyt C. Tillman and Stephen H. West (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 217. Jin, for his part, was citing nobody, but merely invoking what he knew was a widespread understanding. Though appearing to accept Jin's characterization, Ho, 'A rebuttal', p. 139, later notes: 'Although emperor Shih-tsung (1161–89) is known for his nativist movement, including his half-hearted attempts to segregate *meng-an mo-k'o* rank and file from Chinese villagers, there was no explicit prohibition of Jurchen-Chinese intermarriage', to suggest that Shizong was not in fact resisting 'Sinicization', not to suggest that in Jin Shizong's own time revival of anything other than military rigour was an issue at all.

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Chinese Society, the idea of Liao and Jin culturalism was developed more extensively in English-language historiography with the 1976 publication of Jing-shen Tao's *The Jurchen in Twelfth-Century China*.[47]

The frailties of this chain of associations lay in its recursivity: the documents only read as evidence of ethnic sentiment or revivalist enthusiasm if the reader wants them to. The Kitan and Jurchen emperors were dependent upon a coherent conquest class to allow them to govern such densely populated tracts of northern China as they controlled. Insisting that conquest forces refrain from identifying with the conquered is not ethnic in itself, but strategic. With respect to Kitan founder Abaoji, there is no corroboration in *Liao shi* or in known epigraphy of the words Ouyang Xiu attributed to him, no matter how often the passage is quoted. If he did not speak Chinese to his Kitan followers, it was probably because they, unlike Abaoji himself, were unlikely to understand it.[48] With respect to Jin Shizong, *Jin shi* quotes him as twice referring to a ban ('in the early period') on Jurchens wearing Chinese clothes or taking Chinese surnames.[49] But these policies did not apply in Shizong's own time, and he did not forbid Jurchens from speaking Chinese, although he lamented that Jurchen soldiers spoke Chinese exclusively.[50] Instances of him praising individuals who were fluent in multiple languages—especially foreigners who had learnt Jurchen—are unequivocal.[51] Most telling, his pronouncements did not provide later historians with any terminology for Jurchen culture or tradition. *Jiufeng* 舊風 is used six times, not merely as a nostalgic reference to life in the Jurchen homeland, Huining 會寧, but as a specific byword for qualities of hardiness, simplicity, honesty, and martial preparedness; in only one instance is it specifically contrasted to 'customs of the Chinese' (*hanren fengsu* 漢人風俗).[52] Jin Shizong's lament was that people did not, as a result of common descent, necessarily have common cultural qualities; consequently

[47]Jing-shen Tao, *The Jurchen in twelfth-century China: A study in Sinicisation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976). The origins of this work were closely related to that of *History of Chinese society*, but ended up as an independent volume. For a more nuanced view of Shizong and a discussion of his interference in the records of his predecessor, see Hok-lam Chan, 'From tribal chieftain to Sinitic emperor: Leadership contests and succession crises in the Jurchen-Jin state, 1115–1234', *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 33, no. 2, 1999, pp. 105–141, esp. pp. 122 ff. See also Schneider, 'The Jin revisited', in which the cultural restoration argument is traced from Mikami Tsugio 三上次男 (1907–1987) in 1938. See also Peter Bol, 'Seeking common ground: Han literati under Jurchen rule', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 47, no. 2, December 1987, pp. 461–538, for the background to Mikami's view of the Jin period.

[48]The quote is not in *Liao shi* (in fact 漢語 is not in *Liao shi* at all).

[49]*Jin shi* dates at least one of these bans to 1173, which is not very early in the Jin period, but there could have been repeated edicts. *Jin shi juan* 7.

[50]*Jin shi juan* 8, 12, 43. Jurchen language is mentioned five times in *Jin shi* (as *nüzhiyu* 女直語). There are also six references to *guoyu* 國語—once in reference to the adaptation of Kitan characters to write Jurchen (*liezhuan* 11) and once in reference to an official of foreign origin who could translate Jurchen (*liezhuan* 58). While the alternation might be random, the latter appears to correspond to the idea of a written, standardized state language as contrasted to a vernacular language or dialect, and was not exclusive as a denomination of Jurchen. One passage refers to 'six *guoyu*' (*liezhuan* 62), meaning any language used by some political regime as a standard.

[51]See, example, *Jin shi juan* 8, 12, 43, 62.

[52]In *Jin shi juan* 7 the emperor comments that simple Jurchen ways are best for those who cannot become scholars; see also *juan* 35, 45, 80, 88, and 89 for the contrast to *hanren fengsu*.

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martial hardiness and an awareness of Jurchen cultural traditions had to be deliberately inculcated—that is, the specifics of his pronouncements deny essentialism and focus consistently on the strategic retention of conquest class characteristics. In his admonition that Jurchen descendants in China should not forget their roots (*wang ben* 忘本),[53] there is a sense of futurity that sounds a bit like an ethnic notion. But 'roots' can mean anything—parents, language, landscape, pastimes, religion, ancestry, profession, personal experience—and Shizong is not reported specifying any of them in these passages.

In fact, Shizong followed his father in completing the transfer of the Jin capital southwards to what is now Beijing, a move that accelerated the displacement of the power and prestige of the Jurchen aristocracy and appeared to privilege the Chinese population, among whom the Jurchens would now be a tiny minority. Shizong also continued his father's centralizing policies, in many instances following the precedents of the Tang emperorship. Invocations of the traditional culture and language (without promising a return to traditional political forms) were patently political, intended to mollify Jurchen elites, and were contradicted by Shizong's actual policies. Bans on Chinese clothing and surnames—before Zhizong's time, and not restored by him—were typical of requirements intended to preserve status distinctions within a population. This is similar to his pronouncements about visiting Huining, and his wish that Jurchens would return there for periodic sojourns to experience ancestral life.[54] He explicitly associates this in most instances with military preparedness, and never connects it to ancestors or primal loyalties to the Jurchen homeland. There is no point at which *Jin shi* describes Shizong as a Jurchen revivalist, or even suggests that 'revivalism' would have had any meaning at the time.

But the Mikami interpretation of Jin Shizong was not invented from nothing. It came from Qing (1636–1912)—that is, early modern—interpretations of Jin Shizong in court historiography. This interpretation itself evolved from the seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Qing emperors, and it was the eighteenth-century characterization of Shizong[55] that impressed Mikami, who was himself heavily reliant upon eighteenth-century Chinese scholarship on the records of the Liao and Jin periods, particularly the annalistic and linguistic interpolations by Wan Sitong 萬斯同 (1638–1702) and Huang Dahua 黃大華 (ff. *circa* 1889).[56] It is possible that the early Qing rulers did indeed invoke Jin Shizong, but this will always remain uncertain because of the frequent emendations of the records, which became more frequent in the Qianlong period (1736–1796), when an ideological imprint was also more insistent.[57] Nurgaci (Taizu 太祖, 1559–1626) is reported to have looked to the Jin emperors, especially

[53]See as examples *Jin shi juan* 7, 8, 24, 39, 89.

[54]*Jin shi juan* 7. See also Schneider, 'The Jin revisited', p. 392.

[55]For a representative discussion, see Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu way: The Eight Banners and ethnic identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 276–277.

[56]See the long review of the second volume of Mikami's *Kindai seiji seido no kenkyū* by Herbert Franke in *T'oung Pao*, vol. 5, 1971, pp. 320–325.

[57]Hok-lam Chan, *The historiography of the Chin dynasty: Three studies* (Wiesbaden: Miunchener Ostasiatische Studien, I970). On eighteenth-century revisions of seventeenth-century documents, see Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A translucent mirror: History and identity in Qing imperial ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 36, 83, 95–96, 115–116, 118, 124–125, 137–138, 153, 163–164, 183, 188, 267, 300.

the first four (that is, ending with Shizong), as the great state builders in Manchuria. Hung Taiji (1592–1643, Taizong 太宗)[58] certainly read the *Jin shi* with interest, and commissioned the translation of it (along with *Liao shi* and *Yuan shi* 元史) into Manchu in the 1630s. The Shunzhi (r. 1644–1661), Kangxi (r. 1662–1722), and Yongzheng (r. 1723–1735) emperors all mentioned Shizong as among the most important of their imperial predecessors in China (perhaps second in importance after Li Shimin of the Tang period),[59] and the personal point of direct transmission of the Mandate of Heaven to Yuan, Ming, and on to Qing.[60] They paid to augment his tomb, made multiple journeys there to worship, and drew repeated parallels between Shizong's use of Beijing as a capital and their own. But what gets most attention is the quote by Hung Taiji in the Qing annals in which he lectured his sons and military commanders of 1636—as he was transforming the Aisin khanate into the Qing empire—on the importance of cultural conservatism: 'From the moment Shizong took the throne, he planned diligently to follow the example of his ancestors, worked exhaustively to seek righteous governance, fearing only that his sons and grandsons would in practice use the customs of Han.' Hung Taiji continued, 'In clothing and language, Shizong adhered to the old system (*jiuzhi* 舊制), continually practicing riding and shooting, to perfect the martial arts. Despite this regimen, the rulers coming after him became ineffectual. They forgot about riding and shooting, then in the time of emperor Jin Aizong 哀宗 (1198–1234), there came a flood of crises, and the dynasty was destroyed.'[61]

Hung Taiji is described here (in amended Qing records) reifying Jurchen tradition and ascribing that reification to Jin Shizong, something for which there is no foundation in *Jin shi*. His insertion of the term *jiuzhi* 舊制, which occurs frequently in *Jin shi* but never with the meaning Hung Taiji ascribes to it here, is striking.[62] In Hung Taiji's pronouncement *jiuzhi* glosses to Manchu *fe doro*, which does mean 'tradition',

[58]This is more correctly rendered (from a 1621 document) as 'Hongtaiji', but since that is the exact romanization of the Chinese characters for this Manchu name, I use Hung Taiji to specify the Manchu as contrasted to the Chinese characters.

[59]Crossley, *A translucent mirror*, pp. 34–35.

[60]Pierro Corradini, 'On the multinationality of the Qing empire', *Acta orientalia academiae scientiarum Hungarica*, vol. 51, no. 3, 1998, pp. 341–354.

[61]世宗即位奮圖法祖勤求治理惟恐子孫仍效法漢俗.衣服語言悉遵舊制時時練習騎射以備武功雖垂訓如此後世之君漸至懈廢忘其騎射至於哀宗社稷傾危國遂滅亡. The text is best known from a stelae dedicated in 1752, '居安思危碑' where the Qianlong emperor describes himself reading the official annals of the Hung Taiji reign (*Taizong Wenhuangdi shilu*: 1636 *juan* 32. 太宗文皇帝實錄, 內載: '崇德元年十一月癸醜日 《清太宗實錄》卷三二, 崇德元年十一月癸醜). It is possible that 'riding and shooting' (*qishe* 騎射) is metaphorical, but if so it is metaphorical for the military preparedness and, perhaps, coherence of the military caste, not a metaphor for ethnicity. On Hung Taiji's reading of the chronicles of Jin Shizong, see *Manzhou yuanliu kao* as cited below and Zhaolian 昭槤 (1776–1830) *Xiaoting za lu* 嘯亭雜錄 *juan* l. See also Jesse D. Sloane, 'Rebuilding Confucian ideology: Ethnicity and biography in the appropriation of tradition', *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2014, pp. 2–35.

[62]*jiuzhi* 舊制 is mentioned 77 times in *Jin shi*. When not an obvious reference to the Zhou, Tang, or Song periods, it relates to medical practices, land use rules, official appointments, historiographical methods, criminal punishments, military discipline, distribution of salaries and pensions, scheduling of sacrifices, or provisioning of the troops; in a few instances among the essays (*zhi* 志), it relates to methods of making armillary spheres. See additional discussion by Jesse D. Sloane, 'The central territories as an anti China: The Jurchen Jin in its contemporary regional discourse', 2016: Academia.edu repository, https://www.academia.edu/44976878/The_Central_Territories_as_an_Anti_China_The_Jurchen_Jin_in_Its_Contemporary_Regional_Discourse?hb-sb-sw=42399021, [accessed 17 June 2024]; and Xin Wen, 'The

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and in Qing imperial edicts of the eighteenth century (not in Hung Taiji's own time), it was used along with other catch phrases to contrast ostensibly Manchu values of simplicity, frugality, frankness, and loyalty to ostensibly Chinese values of extravagance, duplicity, hedonism, and unreliability.[63] In *Manzhou yuanliu kao* 滿洲源流考 (1743)[64] there are four references to Jin Shizong, and they reproduce the content and much of the wording of the comments attributed to Hung Taiji in 1636: Shizong is described as revering and preserving the customs of the ancestors, forbidding Jurchens to dress or speak like the Chinese, and requiring them to retain martial customs, lest the dynasty be lost.[65] This is not what the *Jin shi* says, though the relationship of military preparedness to the fate of the empire is consistently stressed. Hung Taiji's actual reverence for Shizong as a model of centralizing, innovative, effective rule is perhaps best preserved in his epithet for Shizong: 'Little Yao and Shun 小堯舜',[66] not the most likely description for a Jurchen cultural revivalist or champion of ethnic identity. But the eighteenth-century retrojection of ethnic assumptions was characteristic not only of the legal and historiographical interventions of the Qianlong court, but of early modern imperial courts elsewhere; it became a primary conceptual source for twentieth-century understanding of not only Jurchen Jin history, but Kitan Liao before it.[67]

Axiomatic ethnicity and grand models of the Kitan polity

At the time that *Chinese society: Liao* was published, Carrington Goodrich hailed it as one of the seminal works of historiography of the 1940s and noted that it catapulted the relatively obscure Liao dynasty to the forefront of English-language knowledge of Asia. He also noted that the work exploded 'the old idea that the Chinese absorb all their conquerors'.[68] Though Wittfogel had not yet published his most famous book, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*, his thesis was well known from his lectures. He emphasized the importance of large-scale irrigation systems, river management, and other public works in early agricultural societies, which required centralized, hierarchical, professional, and comparatively large government. He saw the suppression of conflict between aristocrats and commoners as the simplest explanation for the absence of historical transformation—on a European model—in ancient societies of Asia, the Middle East, and pre-contact Americas; this was commonly characterized

road to literary culture: Revisiting the Jurchen language examination system', *T'oung Pao*, vol. 101, no. 1–3, 2015, pp. 130–167.

[63]Elliott, *The Manchu way*, p. 9, comments that *fe doro* as an abstraction is not an early Qing formulation. He dates *fe doro* to 1729, which suggests that insertion of this phrase into Hung Taiji's speech is an emendation that dates from well after Hung Taiji's time. On the eighteenth century as a period of state reification of Manchu culture, see Crossley, *A translucent mirror*, pp. 296–310.

[64]Pamela Kyle Crossley, '*Manzhou yuanliu kao* and formalisation of the Manchu heritage', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 46, no. 4, November 1987, pp. 761–790.

[65]*Manzhou yuanliu kao* 16 and 192.

[66]Ibid., p. 16.

[67]For a sampling of discussions, see Crossley, *A translucent mirror*; Kathleen Wilson, *A new imperial history: Culture, identity and modernity in Britain and the empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 15–18; Lisa Balabanilar, *Imperial identity in the Mughal empire: Memory and dynastic politics in early modern South and Central Asia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[68]L. Carrington Goodrich, 'Review', *Far Eastern Survey*, vol. 18, no. 16, August 1949, p. 191.

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as 'Oriental despotism', despite the fact that his model was never limited to Asian societies.[69] In such scenarios, he suggested, political tensions most frequently arose between, on the one side, the rulers who used bureaucracies and civil law as their primary tools of power, and on the other side, aristocrats who tended to try to resist loss of power through the assertion of traditional codes of privilege and deference. The result was repeated transfers of power to aristocratic challengers who then pursued ruling dynastic power in their own right, rather than fundamentally transforming state and society. The reason, Wittfogel suggested, why even these border regimes with stronger aristocracies and weaker emperorships did not evince European-style progression lay in the role of 'Chinese' bureaucrats and advisers who persistently transmitted Han-style imperial bureaucratic influences to border states.

Similar arguments have also been made for Northern Wei, Jurchen Jin, and Qing—and by historical inference Tang—as stable political regimes in which military castes were not uniformly assimilated to Chinese culture and society, but civil servants were sufficiently Chinese—either by birth or by acculturation—to provide fiscal and administrative stability.[70] These interpretations have also been applied to the survival of minority cultures, including Islam, settled in China not by 'Sinicizing',[71] but by hybridizing.[72] But there have also been instances of dynasties that were, for some time, ruling territories of cultural China—perhaps most prominently Northern Wei,

[69]Wittfogel's debt to Marx and Engels seems clear. Though Wittfogel was an outspoken anti-communist, he acknowledged this debt, enthusiastically. However, he may have misrepresented the degree to which Marx actually developed this theory, which was primarily put together by Engels and Kautsky after his death in 1883. Marx did not characterize the Chinese economy as despotic, and his interest in India lay mostly in the activities of the British East India Company. See Maurice Meisner, 'The despotism of concepts: Wittfogel and Marx on China', *The China Quarterly*, vol. 1963, no. 16, October–December 1963, pp. 99–111; Joshua A. Fogel, 'The debates over the Asiatic mode of production in Soviet Russia, China, and Japan', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 1, 1988, pp. 56–79.

[70]On this historiography in the later twentieth century, see David B. Honey, 'Sinicization as statecraft in conquest dynasties of China: Two early medieval case studies', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1996, pp. 115–151. See also Michal Biran, 'The non-Han dynasties', in *The Blackwell companion of Chinese history*, (ed.) M. Szonyi (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), pp. 129–143; Elliott, '*Hushuo*'; Nina Duthie, 'The nature of the Hu: Wuhuan and Xianbei ethnography in the San guo zhi and Hou Han shu', *Early Medieval China*, vol. 25, 2019, pp. 3–41; Sanping Chen, 'Succession struggle and the ethnic identity of the Tang imperial house', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 3, no. 6, 1996, pp. 379–405; Charles Holcombe, 'The Xianbei in Chinese history', *Early Medieval China*, vol. 2013, no. 19, pp. 1–38; Wolfram Eberhard, *Conquerors and rulers. Social forces in medieval China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965). See, however, an important counter-argument against the historical bureaucratization of North Asian regimes by Lhamsuren Munkh-Erdene, *The Taiji government and the rise of the warrior state: The formation of the Qing imperial constitution* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2022).

[71]There is no need for a diversion here into 'Sinicization'/'Sinification' except to point out that my critique is directed at the use in English-language historiography of 'Sinicization'—an unexplained, solipsistic term—to convey not merely 'assimilation', but an exceptionalist pleading for a charismatic and unidirectional element in cultural change across eastern Eurasia. Analyses defending 'Sinicization' on the grounds that assimilation and acculturation have happened do not address this issue. See Pamela Kyle Crossley, 'Thinking about ethnicity in early modern China', *Late Imperial China*, vol. 11, no. 2, June 1990, pp. 1–36; Gillian Rubinstein, *Orphan warriors: Three Manchu generations and the end of the Qing world* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 223–228.

[72]Ralph Litzinger, *Other Chinas: The Yao and the politics of national belonging* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2000); Peter Katzenstein (ed.), *Sinicisation and the rise of China: Civilisational processes beyond east and west* (London: Routledge, 2012); Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A cultural history of Muslims in late imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asia Monographs, 2005).

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Jurchen Jin, and Qing—based upon a conquest class with long connection to agricultural economies apart from China, and consequently larger populations compared to the nomadically derived conquest class of, as an example, the Mongols. Mark Elliott considers this a model of 'limited assimilation', which is the idea that 'to the degree these regimes maintained their ethnic integrity they could expect to retain power in their own hands. The idea here is that alien conquest produced a situation whereby greater distance and fear obtained between ruler and ruled than was the case with Han imperial families.'[73] *Liao shi* and *Jin shi* say nothing about maintaining ethnic integrity, but they do refer often to maintaining military preparedness through the preservation of familiar and long-honed skills at riding and shooting. Most likely through the influence of Owen Lattimore, Wittfogel seems to have been attracted to the border regimes of imperial China as case studies of Asian societies with relatively weak civil governments and therefore largely without the ability to dampen transformative forces in the way that Wittfogel attributed to China, Egypt, and other early centralized regimes. Exactly why his gaze fell upon Kitan Liao is unstated, but the easiest answer is that Chia-sheng Feng, upon whom Wittfogel was dependent for his translation, was a specialist on Liao history who had done undergraduate, master's, and doctoral work on the sources of *Liao shi* and the hermeneutics of Kitan and Jurchen names.[74] The confluence of Wittfogel's theoretical orientation, Feng's scholarly specialization, and the probable assumption on both their parts that Liao-period documents were limited enough in number that an authoritative volume could be completed in a suitable period of time seems to have determined the subject of their study.

In English- and Japanese-language historiography built from *Liao shi* and *Qidan guozhi*, imputations of 'ethnicity' to eleventh- and twelfth-century Inner Asians became part of the narrative of causes and effects in the Kitan Liao imperial period, especially in the seminal work of Shimada Masao (島田正郎, 1915–2009), one of the most important scholars who afterwards elaborated the idea that 'dynasties of conquest' (*seifuku ōchō* or *zhengchao)* was an objective (that is, existing independently of historical construction) phenomenon.[75] This model of Chinese bureaucracy, which was used by some regimes originating at China's borders and eventually conquering some or all of its territories, had a strong impact on Japanese historiography, particularly on Jitsuzō Tamura (田村實造, 1904–1999) in his *Chūgoku seifuku ōchō no kenkyū* 中国征服王朝の研究.[76] After 1949 it was strongly reflected in the *seifuku ōchō* premise of ethnic tension in these conquest elites, as they were pulled between their traditional martial cultures and the attraction of settled life in China. While this was understood to have destabilized the ruling castes (often resulting in short dynastic histories), state longevity was conversely attributable to the relative power of Chinese

[73]Elliott, *The Manchu way*, pp. 5–6.

[74]For Feng's Liao-related publications, see Feng Chia-sheng, *Liao shi yuanliu kao yu Liao shi chujiao* 遼史源流考與遼史初校 (Beijing: Harvard-Yenching Press, 1933); Feng Chia-sheng, 'Qidan ming hao shi' 契丹名號釋, PhD thesis, Yenching University, 1933; Feng Chia-sheng, '*Liao shi yu Jinshu*', *Xin Wudai shi hudeng julie* 遼史與金史、新五代史互證舉例, 史学年报》vol. 2, no. 1, 1934; Feng Chia-sheng, *Weiwu'er zu shiliao jianbian* 維吾爾族史料簡編, 1952. 民族出版社, 1958.

[75]See particularly Shimada, *Ryōdai shakaishi kenkyū* 遼代社会史研究 (Kyoto: Sanwa Shobō, 1952).

[76]Jitsuzō Tamura, *Chūgoku seifuku ōchō no kenkyū* 中国征服王朝の研, 3 vols (Kyoto: Tōyōshi Kenkyūkai, 1964–1971). See also Sun, 'Studies on the Khitan Liao', esp. pp. 396–397.

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or Chinese-educated civil officials. Other Japanese scholars argued that Kitan Liao had followed the Northern Wei example in attempting to resolve these tensions by creating dual government, one nomadic and the other based on the Chinese bureaucracy, each to rule over distinct people.

Out of this model came dichotomies—Kitan and Han, sedentary and nomadic, civil and military—framing not only discussions of Liao history but of a much larger arc from Xiongnu to Qing. The influence of the dichotomous, diarchic model is strong enough that scholars who write of the plasticity and ephemerality of specific cultural identities under Liao—led perhaps in a general way by Fei Xiaotong (费孝通, 1910–2005)[77] but in English-language historiography of Liao led by Nancy Steinhardt[78] and Naomi Standen[79]—can even be criticized by other scholars, as in the case of Steinhardt, for tolerating ambiguities in, or inferring the insignificance of, the question of what might have been 'Kitan' or 'Chinese'.[80] In this interpretation of serial diarchy as a way of dealing with intractable ethnic power contests, the pattern continued in Manchurian history until the Qing period, with the implication that dual government was a patently 'Man-Sen' ('Manchurian-Korean') political pattern, marking North Asian states rising in opposition to China. In such cases, stability was achieved not by elevating Chinese civil officials but by limiting their administration to agricultural and commercial sectors and protecting nomadic or native sectors through direct administration from the court. Shimada placed Kitan Liao firmly on an arc from Xiongnu to Yuan. To him this helped to explain what he saw as the Kitan court wavering over time between, on the one hand, sponsoring Chinese-style reforms in naming, ritual, and dress and, on the other, becoming reactively protective of Kitan language and nomadic identity.[81]

As is well known, Kitan Liao had a bifurcated government superficially consistent with the Man-Sen model, and in this case featuring a 'Northern administration' 北面 and a 'Southern administration' 南面[82] rather than a Kitan administration and Chinese administration. The Northern administration was clearly designed to administer the nomadic or semi-agricultural plantation areas of Mongolia and Manchuria, and the

[77]See the introduction to Fei Xiaotong, *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yiti geju* 中华民族多元一体格局 (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1989) which reflects the general theme of Fei's work from the 1930s on.

[78]Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Liao architecture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).

[79]Naomi Standen, *Unbounded loyalty: Frontier crossing in Liao China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

[80]See, for instance, Dieter Kuhn, 'Qidan innovations and Han-Chinese traditions?', *T'oung Pao*, vol. 86, no. 4, 2000, pp. 325–362; and Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, 'A response to Dieter Kuhn', *T'oung Pao*, vol. 87, no. 4, 2001, pp. 456–462.

[81]Liu, 'Liaochao guohao kaoshi'.

[82]This has also been interpreted in contemporary China as providing an ancient history for 'one country two systems'. A spate of such articles appeared between 2016 to 2018; for one of the few signed pieces, see Lu Weibing 路卫兵, Geng Yi 耿艺 and Ge Ai 葛蔼, 'Liao mu bihua toulu de mimi yiqian nian Qian zhongguo jiu "yiguo liang zhi" le' 辽墓壁画透露 的秘密一千年前中国就『一国两制』 *Zhongguo guojia dili* 中国国家地理, vol. 2015, no. 40. An anonymous '"Hanfa" yu "guosu": Caoyuan diguo de "yiguo liangzhi" "汉法"与"国俗": "草原帝国的"一国两制', *Guangming ribao* 光明日报, vol. 10, no. 33, July 2017, attempts to suggest an ethnic dichotomy between *hanfa* and *guosu*. Both phrases occur in *Liao shi*, but never in association with or contrast to each other. *Hanfa* refers to official behaviours, and *guosu* just means folk customs (usually but not always Kitan). See *Liao shi juan* 49, 53, 66.

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Southern administration was designed to administer the densely populated agricultural and urban areas of the former Sixteen Counties. Kitan may have been the normal language used in Northern business, and Chinese was certainly the language used in the South, yet the lack of surviving Kitan documentation raises insoluble questions over whether a significant amount of administrative communication in the Northern administration was really in Kitan, or if it was deliberately destroyed by later regimes. The structure of government in the Southern territories was a continuation of the pattern already used in the area for centuries, most recently by the Tang (618–905) and Later Jin (936–947) regimes. The Chinese population of the Sixteen Counties probably constituted more than half of the entire population of the empire, and together with the populous Bohai region of Dan gur in southern Manchuria very far outweighed the empire's nomadic and semi-nomadic populations.[83] The *han'er* administration and the Southern administration generally was for this reason important and its directors were men in whom the highest trust was placed.

The practice of continuing with the structure of local government of conquered territories under new command is a typical conquest technique, from Northern Wei to Qing; it is found in many other regions, and in many forms pervades the histories of European colonialism in South Asia and Africa. What Shimada, Wittfogel, Feng, and others added was the idea that 'ethnic' coherence controlled not only the form but the substance of the Kitan Liao Northern and Southern bifurcation. The fact that the early *han'er* directory (*han'er* 漢兒四) was the seed of (and remained appended to) what became the Southern administration seems to have encouraged the idea that 'Southern' was not a reference to a territory, political tradition, or economic pattern, but primarily to the people living there. Kitan Liao founder Abaoji (872–926) himself had prescribed that the two administrations would be divided by 'custom' (*su* 俗, which presumably means language, dress, and ritual), but from the middle levels upwards the personnel associated with the two administrations did not evince consistency in their origins, and whether Abaoji expected the system to be permanent is unclear. *Liao shi* does not show the functions of the Northern and Southern administrations of Kitan Liao to be exclusively derived from culture, nor could they in practice have been discrete. The Northern administration functions pertained to the nomadic economic zone and dependent peoples within it (whether Turkic, Xi, Bohai, or *han*), as well as the finances of the imperial household. The Southern administration oversaw taxation, rent, and criminal adjudication in the Sixteen Counties, and administered the acquisition and care of military horses.[84] Men from powerful lineages (including the Han of Jizhou) often held the Southern Chancellery, more often held the Northern, and sometimes held both.[85] Among the classes of dependent farmers, soldiers, labourers, and civil functionaries, *han, hanren*, and *hanmin* were terms that were of practical use in the Liao law code (in relationship to which the *Liao shi* suggests no need to define them) as markers of inferior status; for many violations, *han* were punished more

[83]Jesse D. Sloane, 'Mapping a stateless nation: "Bohai" identity in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, vol. 44, 2014, pp. 365–403.

[84]The entirety of Abaoji's prescriptions are reported in *Liao shi juan* 45. It ends with the phrase *yinsu er zhi, de qi yi yi* 因俗而治, 得其宜矣—'to observe custom while governing will be appropriate'.

[85]A table of the officials can be completed from the information provided in *biao* 表 and *zhi* 志 of the history. See Tamura, *Chūgoku seifuku ōchō*, pp. 331–332. The most detailed summary in English is Wittfogel and Feng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*, pp. 428 ff.

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severely than Kitans. Chinese descendants who remained in servile positions, even as functionaries of the civil government, remained *han'er*, and under the jurisdiction of the Southern administration unless they were registered in nomadic estates.[86] The apparent key criteria for appointment to both the Southern and Northern chancellorships were demonstrated loyalty and competence. Cultural or lineage origins were of no demonstrated significance, despite the fictive association of 'Kitan' with the North and 'Chinese' with the South.

Han Zhigu, Han Kuangsi, and Han Derang on the ground

Documents and historians have a self-referential relationship. Historians of one era preserve documents according to their priorities, and historians of a future era read the surviving documents according to theirs. Archaeology has tended to disrupt this circularity, tossing up material evidence that was possibly not intended to be seen by those of the future and that perhaps does not fit the paradigms that historians have imposed on the past. Archaeology relating to Central and Inner Asia has consistently undermined modern construction of monolithic or essentialized identities, especially those embedded in a dichotomous framework that has been built up over a thousand years of historiography, and a hundred years of social science derived from it.[87] For both Ye Longli and the later compilers of *Liao shi* (partly because both relied upon Song imperial documents), Kitan Liao history was largely the story of the geographical interface between Liao and Song, and the dichotomy between *han* and *kitan*. But this was a tiny portion of the real Liao imperial expanse, and there is no mention at all of the long wall (sometimes erroneously attributed to Jin, which built a different wall)[88] constructed by the Kitan Liao government to manage the nomadic peoples on the borders of what is now northern Mongolia and southern Siberia. As a consequence, a fragment of historical Kitan Liao activities are reflected in the *Liao shi* (compare the

[86]The principles and some of the history of the laws are described in *Liao shi juan* 61 (刑法志上) and *juan* 62 (刑法志下). Substantial references to law as applied to *han* are found only in *Liao shi juan* 61.

[87]Regarding the archaeology of Kitan Liao, Lance Pursey has commented, 'The idea that there was an ahistorical essential Han identity that transcended history is a fiction of the modern present. This is not to say that northerners and southerners did not recognise cultural barriers between them but to say they were Han would be tenuous. As previously stated prior to the Liao the frontier region south of the Yan mountains was a culturally mixed place. The coherence of referring to groups from this region as Han involves a constant readjusting of the goalposts. Putting aside ethnic assumptions a stronger case can be made that epitaphs were part of mortuary customs in the south that were reintroduced to the north by certain migrant families.' See Lance Pursey, 'The necropolitan elite of northeast China in the long eleventh century: A social history of Liao dynasty epitaphs (907–1125)', PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2019, p. 55. See also William Honeychurch, 'The nomad as state builder: Historical theory and material evidence from Mongolia', *Journal of World Prehistory*, vol. 26, no. 4, December 2013, pp. 283–321.

[88]For description of the excavations, see Nicolay N. Kradin et al. (eds), *The Great Wall of Khitan: North eastern wall of Chinggis Khan* (Moscow: Nauka–Vostochnaya Literatura, 2019); Michaek Storozum et al. (eds), 'Mapping the medieval wall system of China and Mongolia: A multi-method approach', *Land*, vol. 10, 2021, article no. 997; Gideon Shelach-Lavi et al. (eds), 'Medieval long-wall construction on the Mongolian Steppe during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries AD', *Antiquity*, vol. 94, no. 375, 2020, pp. 724–741; Andrei V. Lunkov et al. (eds), 'The frontier fortification of the Liao empire in eastern Transbaikalia', *The Silk Road*, vol. 9, 2011, pp. 104–121.

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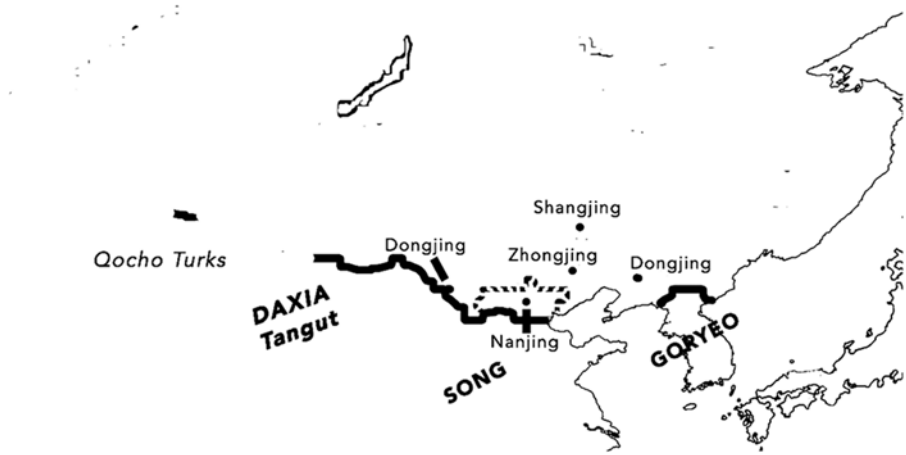

Figure 1. Map showing Kitan Liao space as suggested by *Liao shi*. *Source:* The author.

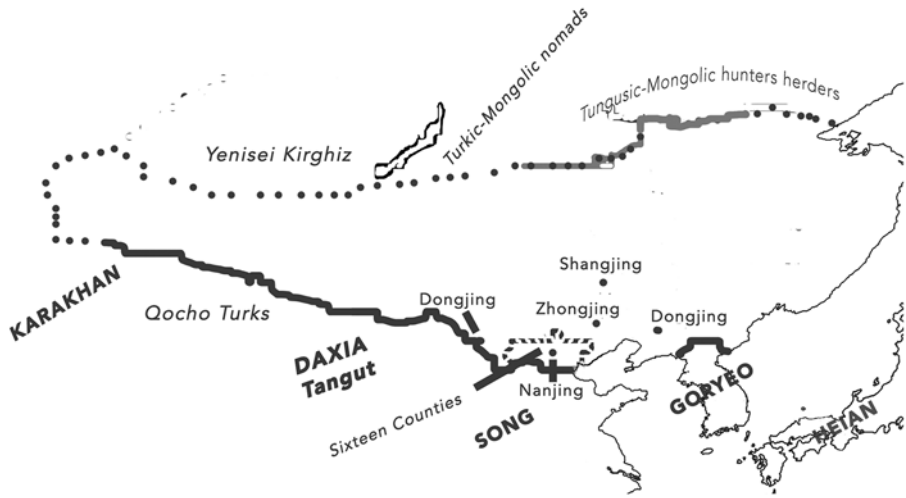

Figure 2. Map showing Kitan Liao space as suggested by Arabic, Persian, and Turkic sources. *Source:* The author.

maps in Figures 1 and 2). Only in the interstices does *Liao shi* suggest that Kitans were not alone at the centre of Liao government, aristocracy, and army, as they were closely associated in all matters with the Xi 奚 (Kai/Qai),[89] and with Uighurs who were not external to the empire. This contrasts with Persian and Arabic sources, backed by

[89]And also Kumoxi 庫莫奚, with origins among Särbi related peoples (the Wuhuan 烏桓 in this case, related or identical to the Avars, and speaking a language related to Kitan), but hostile to the Northern Wei regime and subsequently subordinate to Kitan Liao. Omeljan Pritsak, 'Two migratory movements in the Eurasian steppes in the 9th–11th centuries', *Proceedings of the 26th Congress of Orientalists*, vol. 2, 1968, pp. 158–162. In Arabic records they were referred to as Qay, a name Christopher Atwood traces to Chinese *hu*, particularly 'Eastern Hu' (Donghu 東胡). See Atwood, 'The Qai, the Khongai, and the names of the Xiōngnú'; see also Duthie, 'The nature of the Hu'.

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occasional Turkic epigraphy, outlining very active trade and communications between Kitan Liao and the sultanates of Central Asia, and providing particulars not available in Chinese records.[90] Tombs excavated in Inner Mongolia have long supplied objects showing the true extent of Kitan imperial engagement with all of North Asia, Central Asia, and Northeast Asia extending as far as the peoples of the Amur River, Sakhalin, Korea, and Japan.[91] In many ways the most dramatic archaeological developments have been the sites related to the Han of Jizhou—the necropolis near Baiyinwulasumu 白音勿拉苏木 village, north of the site of the Kitan capital at Shangjing,[92] and the tomb of Han Derang himself in Beizhen 北鎮, Liaoning province.

Han Zhigu (d. 936)[93] is conventionally mentioned with Kang Moji 康默記 (d. 920?)[94] and Han Yanhui 韓延徽 (882–959) as one of the original Chinese literati employed by Kitan founder Abaoji (Taizu 太祖, 872–926). Zhigu was abducted in the first decade of the tenth century at a very young age, long before the Sixteen Counties were surrendered in 938. Because he was literate he entered the service of the imperial family soon after he was taken, and married a woman of high rank. He was the first director of the *han'er* administrative department and his descendants were frequently appointed as its director. Zhigu was the founder—within the Kitan Liao territories—of the Han lineage of Jizhou, and he is best known to historians as the father of Han Kuangsi (917–982) and grandfather of Han Derang. He was also the progenitor of major lines of *han* civil bureaucrats of the Kitan Liao period who were not descendants of Han Kuangsi but of Zhigu's many other sons; they lived in several political centres, and perhaps best known among them was Han Qixian 韓企先 (1081–1146) a noted late Liao and early Jin official.[95] Such *han* were the numerical majority of Zhigu's descendants, and appear to have been typical *han* or *han'er* functionaries. Both Chinese- and English-language historiography tends to ignore this majority, however, in favour of highlighting Kuangsi and Derang.

[90]See Dilnoza Duturaeva, *Qarakhanid roads to China: A history of Sino-Turkic relations* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2022); Michal Biran, 'Unearthing the Liao dynasty's relations with the Muslim world: Migrations, diplomacy, commerce, and mutual perceptions', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, vol. 43, 2013, pp. 221–251; Anya King, 'Early Islamic sources on the Kitan Liao: The role of trade', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, vol. 43, 2013, pp. 253–271; Francois Louis and Valerie Hansen, 'Shaping symbols of privilege: Precious metals and the early Liao aristocracy', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, vol. 50, 2021, pp. 91–131.

[91]See Xinlin Dong, 'The Shangjing norm of the Liao dynasty and the Dongjing mode of the Northern Song dynasty', *Chinese Archaeology*, vol. 20, no.1, 2020, pp. 179–192, on varieties of city plans and possible influences; Hu Lin, 'A tale of five capitals: Contests for legitimacy between the Liao and its rivals', *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2010, pp. 99–127; Nikolai Kradin and Alexandr L.Ivliev, 'The downfall of the Bohai state and the ethnic structure of the Kitan city of Chintolgoi Balgas in Mongolia', *Current Archeological Research in Mongolia: Papers from the First International Conference on Archaeological Research in Mongolia*, Ulaanbaatar, 19–23 August 2007, pp. 461–476; Jeehee Hong, '"Nomadic" underworlds in the western capital of the Liao', *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, vol. 51, 2022, pp. 157–205; Wang Shanjun王善军, 'Liao Song Xixia Jin shiqi zu ji yinshi wenhua jiaoliu lüelun 辽宋西夏金时期族际饮食文化交流略论', *Journal of Hebei University Philosophy and Social Science* 河北大学学报 《哲学社会科学报》 vol. 46, no. 5, September 2021, pp. 74–81.

[92]Now a museum outside Lindong, Baarin Left Banner, Inner Mongolia. See Zhengxie Balin zuoqi weiyuanhui 政協巴林左旗委員會 (eds), *Da Liao Han Zhigu jiazu* 大辽韩知古家族 (Huhhot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 2002).

[93]*Liao shi juan* 47 (百官志三　南面朝官) and 66 (biography of Han Zhigu appended to the biography of Yelü Dici 敵剌) and others.

[94]*Liao shi juan* 74.

[95]*Jin shi juan* 78.

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Han Kuangsi was fluent in Kitan from a young age, and it may even have been his first language. He was raised in the palace under the eye of the empress. He performed very few functions characteristic of a *han* official, and evinced none of the merit required from them. Kuangsi and his sons were, however adept navigators of aristocratic politics, and in 969 were leaders of a successful plot to depose Emperor Muzong 穆宗 (Yelü Jing 耶律璟, 931–969) and replace him with Emperor Jingzong 景宗 (Yelü Xian 耶律賢, 948–982). Titles and lucrative appointments flowed to Kuangsi and his sons. During the Jingzong reign Kuangsi was known for his charming personality, observance of 'national customs' (*guosu*), medical knowledge, bad strategic advice, and a disgraceful defeat by Song armies at Mancheng in 980, after which he received a public scolding from the emperor but no charges and no punishment.[96] As I have pointed out before, Kuangsi's life was not that of a *han*. It was that of a Kitan aristocrat and in fact most resembles that of his close friend and collaborator, Yelü Sha (耶律沙, d. 988).[97] Not only was Kuangsi raised in the most privileged precincts of the empire and showered with titles, he was also repeatedly enfeoffed (that is, given revenue-producing prefectures, *touxia* 投下).[98] These enfeoffed territories were generally endowed with plentiful dependent labourers (a lot of them drawn from China), who worked the farms and animal pens, or manufactured ceramics, textiles, or weapons.

For at least the last decade of his life Kuangsi was aided or in fact represented by his favoured son, Derang, in many official duties. Derang's first, extremely youthful, appointment was in the *han*-staffed segments of the bureaucracy (*dongtou* 東頭), which remained close to his administration for the remainder of his life.[99] After Kuangsi's death in 982 Derang formed a political partnership with the empress dowager Chengtian 承天皇太后 (Xiao Chuo 蕭綽 or Yanyan 燕燕, 953–1009) that endured until her death in 1009.[100] Derang became a legendary military commander in the war against Song, was known as an effective and compassionate administrator, and was so trusted by the highest-ranking councillors that he filled their positions when they were ill. This ultimately resulted in him simultaneously running both the Northern and the Southern administrations. Like his father he was awarded not only a number of enfeoffed counties but also his own estate (*fu* 府) in the last year of his life. He basically owned the region that is encompassed today by the city of Beizhen, Liaoning; among his possessions were about 5,000 unspecified (most likely Kitan) households, and another 8,000 households that included both *han* and *fan*. In the last years of his life Derang was given the imperial surname Yelü and the personal name Longyun, the two characters—'imperial' (or 'dragon') and 'fortune'—later used by Ye Longli to describe Han Derang's career.

In death, the discontinuity between Han Zhigu and his descendants who became Kitan aristocrats is stark. Despite the fact Han Zhigu is not known to be buried at

[96]*Liao shi juan* 66.

[97]Crossley, 'Outside in', p. 63.

[98]*Qidan guozhi juan* 18.

[99]*Liao shi* makes clear that even at the time of this appointment, Derang was also at the centre of court political affairs because of his father. *Liao shi juan* 82, *liezhuan* 12.

[100]*Liao shi juan* 71. For more on Chengtian, see Linda Cooke Johnson, *Women of the conquest dynasties: Gender and identity in Liao and Jin China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2011), pp. 126–132.

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the Baiyinwulasumu complex, many historians and archaeologists persist in referring to the necropolis as 'centred on the family of Han Zhigu'.[101] The site of Han Zhigu's tomb, if it survives, is unknown at present, but is very likely located in the Liaoxi valley (the site of the capital city of Shangjing in which the majority of the family spent their careers),[102] where many of his descendants who remained *han* and served as bureaucrats are buried. The centre of the Baiyinwulasumu necropolis is manifestly not Zhigu, but his son, Han Kuangsi: the tomb complex is near a town that was awarded to Kuangsi's descendants in 991, Kuangsi is buried there, and familial relationship to him appears the clearest criterion for inclusion.[103] At both Baiyinwulasumu and Beizhen, some of the important tombs, including those of Kuangsi and Derang, are in the rounded pattern long noted in the archaeology of Goguryeo and Balhae sites, and common for Chinese tombs of the Tang period, but not Song.[104]

The Baiyinwulasumu tombs have epitaphs, many of them long, in Kitan, and in many cases the texts can be correlated to biographical entries in *Liao shi*.[105] But the necropolis solves some puzzles left by *Liao shi*. In the history, Han Zhigu appears to have only one son, making it easy for much later readers to see him as founder of a 'third culture'. But the epitaphs at Baiyinwulasumu cumulatively make it clear that he had 11 sons, some of them full brothers of Kuangsi born of a consort-class wife, and others born of a concubine or second wife.[106] All the sons seem to have gone on to

[101]As one example, see Liu Wei 劉 未, 'Liaodai hanren muzang 遼代漢人墓葬研究', *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究, vol. 24, no. 1, June 2006, pp. 443–482.

[102]Pursey, 'The Necropolitan elite', pp. 72–76, 149.

[103]The size and location of the Baiyinwulasumu complex might have roughly corresponded to the *touxia* granted to Kuangsi; the lineage had operated its own estate in the same neighbourhood from the late years of Kuangsi's life (when construction of his own tomb was planned there); see Liu Pujiang, 'Liaochao de touxia zhidu yu touxia junzhou 遼朝的頭下制度與頭下軍州', in *Songmo zhi jian* 松漠之間 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), pp. 73–88.

[104]The earliest known Kitan burial practices did not involve inhumation or tomb structures; such practices were imported from China (possibly as part of the imperial complex), though round tombs used earlier by the Chinese and still common across southern Manchuria had largely gone out of style in China itself by the Song period. Nicolas Tackett, 'Mortuary cultures across the Chinese–steppe divide', in his *The origins of the Chinese nation: Song China and the forging of an East Asian world order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 211–245; Liaoning Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology; Jinzhou Municipal Museum; Office of Cultural Heritage of Beizhen City, 'The excavation of Liao dynasty tomb of Han Derang in Beizhen, Liaoning', *Chinese Archaeology*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2022, pp. 121–134; Liaoning Provincial Institute of Culture Relics and Archaeology, Jinzhou Municipal Institute of Culture Relics and Archaeology and Beizhen City Commission for Preservation of Ancient Monuments, 'The excavation of Yelü Hongli's tomb in Beizhen City, Liaoning', *Chinese Archaeology*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2019, pp. 122–134. The Kitan Liao elite seemed to carry these tomb patterns into Central Asia with them in the Kara-Kitai (Xi Liao) period; see Michael Biran et al., 'The Kök-Tash underground mausoleum in north-eastern Kyrgyzstan: The first-ever identified Qara Khitai elite tomb?', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2023, pp. 713–745.

[105]Kitan naming practices are not completely understood, making it difficult to know how Kitans might have referred to themselves in Kitan settings, and also impossible to ascertain in some instances exactly who the subject of an epitaph is. Liu Pujiang 劉浦江 and Kang Peng 康鵬, 'Qidan ming, zichushi—wenhua renleixue shiye xia de fu zi liangming zhi 契丹名, 字初釋—文化人類學視野下的父子連名制', *Wenshi* 文, no. 3, 2005, p. 33.

[106]Research by Wang Yuting suggests that Zhigu's wife's name was Ounimaiza 歐妮邁紮 and that she was from the Ouguni 歐古妮, a 'sub-lineage' of the Xiao; this is also the reported origin of Han Kuangsi's wife. 'Sub-lineage' possibly refers to what we would understand as a lineage—in this case, with consort

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achieve high ranks. Ye Longli noted the ubiquity of Han of Jizhou descendants at the highest levels of the military and the bureaucracy; he attributed this to Han Derang, who had no sons himself, but after whose death honours flowed to his nephews and grand-nephews. But the necropolis makes clear that the rise of the family dated much earlier. The prominence of the Han of Jizhou dates virtually to the founding of the Kitan state. By the time that Kuangsi was a young man, his brothers had already become influential at court and in the military hierarchy, and were visible in the civil government to a lesser degree. Kuangsi and his brothers may already have been aristocrats, or were very close to that status; Kuangsi's own sons were aristocrats in full, and it was he more than Han Derang who accounted for the status of his descendants. This is what is physically commemorated by the Baiyinwulasumu necropolis.

In Han Derang's tomb at Beizhen, the epitaphs in Chinese and in Kitan celebrate Han Derang (both under that name and as Yelü Longyun) as the owner of Changli 昌黎 (a name derived from a third-century military district).[107] While *Liao shi* connects Han Derang to Shangjing (the most frequently mentioned locality in connection with the descendants of Kuangsi) and Nanjing (where he was based for a time as dual director of the North and South administrations), archaeology, in contrast, focuses his presence in Liaoning province. His mission there is suggested by a few remarks in his *Liao shi* biography and clarified by the extensive archaeology at this site. After the conclusion of war with Song in 1005, Kitan Liao strategic attention shifted east to the populous area of Dan gur, once the political centre of the Bohai polity, and still the residence of Bohai who had not been transferred to servile work in Mongolia. Kitan rule over the region had proved difficult, partly because of the attempts of Abaoji's eldest son Yelü Bei (Tuyu 突欲, 899–937) to create a secessionist regime there in the early tenth century, and partly because of the long history of distinct political traditions there.[108] Han Derang moved to the region to reinforce Kitan control, and ran his personal estate there with well over 10,000 households, most or all of whom were captives from the Sixteen Counties or from Dan gur. Having been, uniquely, the prime minister (*zaixiang*) of the Kitan Liao bureaucracy, Han Derang ended his days as its greatest military authority, occupying its most volatile sector.[109]

The break in status between Han Zhigu, a *han* servitor of the Kitan imperial family, and Han Kuangsi, a privileged Kitan speaker, virtual adoptee of the imperial lineage,

status, which is what seems to be indicated by 'Xiao'. See Wu Xueliang 吴学俍, 'Han shi ying hao zhi duoshao—Da Liao Yutian Han shi jiazu shixi kaozheng' 韩氏英豪知多少—大辽玉田韩氏家族世系考证, *Tangshan shehui kexue* 唐山社会科学, vol. 2, 2009, pp. 42–45, and vol. 4, 2010, pp. 49–52, 55.

[107]In tomb stelae the lineage of Han Kuangsi-Han Derang later claimed that Han Zhigu had been a native of Changli county in modern Hebei province. The literary name 韓 昌黎of the Tang scholar Han Yü 韓愈 (768 –824) seemed to claim that he was from Changli, though he is known to have been born in Henan province. In *Liao shi*, Changli does not occur in the titles of either Han Kuangsi or Han Derang. Either the later members of the lineage claimed association with Changli in Hebei in an attempt to imply descent from Han Yü, or Changli is the name of another place (which could also account for Han Yü associating himself with 'Changli'). See also Ge Huating 葛华廷, 'Han Kuangsi muzhi ji qi xiangguan de jige wenti 韩匡嗣墓志及其相关的几个问题', *Beifang wenwu*《北方文物》, vol. 1997, no. 3, pp. 30–36.

[108]Crossley, 'Bohai/Balhae identity and the coherence of Dan gur'.

[109]Less than a century after Derang's death the region was convulsed in a rebellion of the Balhae that coincided with the end of Liao and the founding of the Jurchen Jin dynasty. See Sloane, 'Mapping a stateless nation', pp. 369–370.

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and mover behind the coup of 969 that put Jingzong in power, was already clear enough in the narratives in *Qidan guozhi* and *Liao shi,* but had become overlaid by a much later narrative of a 'third culture', giving the Kitan Liao empire a peculiar profile. But on the ground that break is incontrovertible. Epitaphs acknowledge descent from Han Zhigu, as they acknowledge descent from other lineages, but their spacing from Han Zhigu's burial place, wherever it is, speaks of the true disparity between his status and theirs. By descent, Kuangsi was at most half Chinese (the case with all of Han Zhigu's children) and his sons had a Chinese grandfather but no other known Chinese ancestral lines. *Liao shi* makes it obvious that, from Kuangsi on, the family, who remained part of the powerful political clique, were native Kitan speakers. But the point on which *Liao shi* is silent—whether ancestry (apart from its political implications) had much to with the identity of any of these men—is eloquently expressed in the archaeology. Han Derang himself is not buried anywhere near his father, who is not buried anywhere near his father. Han Kuangsi's necropolis is most likely located near his landholdings in life, and Derang's tomb is carefully located in the middle of his lands far to the east of the Baiyinwulasumu complex. The arrangement suggests that Kuangsi's and Derang's identities were each represented in relation to their respective estates. Each man in this generational sequence from Zhigu to Derang was ascribed a distinct identity, dependent not on ancestry, or language, or a sense of common descent, but upon rank and relationship to sources of wealth and military power in real time. Rank was an absolute, and could be unambiguously expressed in space as well as time.

There is nothing remarkable in the fact that a hundred years on, some descendants of tenth-century Chinese bureaucrats serving the Kitan Liao were still recognizable as *han* bureaucrats (despite, in this case, obvious Kitan ancestry), while their distant relatives were Kitan aristocrats. The Han of Jizhou descended from Han Kuangsi are not the only population whose character has been obscured by an ideology of twentieth-century historiography that equates lineage (in most cases a single lineage among innumerable ancestral lines) with ethnicity. The 'Xiao' lineage that is depicted in *Qidan guozhi* and *Liao shi* as intermarrying, over and over again, with men named Yelü was probably not a lineage, but a consort status distributed to a range of lineages eligible to marry Yelü; what the Kitan term for this status might have been is unclear, since 'Xiao' or its cognate has not yet been recognized in Kitan epigraphs.[110] Indeed, the idea that Yelü itself was a lineage or clan is not supported by Kitan epigraphy. The 'national name' appears to have been applied to an amalgamation of genealogical Abaoji descendants together with other lineages given factitious kinship to it by way of universalizing their aristocratic status. We know something of the deep ancestral diversity of Yelü, because at least three Chinese lineages attested in *Liao shi*—the Li ancestors of Yelü Zhongxi (Li Zhongxi 李仲禧, f. 1058–1080), the Zhang ancestors of Yelü Xiaojie (Zhang Xiaojie, 張孝傑, f. 1055–1080), and the Chen ancestors of Yelü

[110]Some authors wrestle with the opacity of the Xiao appellation by assuming it is a 'clan' within which were individual lineages. Jennifer Holmgren, 'Marriage, kinship and succession under Ch'i–tan rulers of the Liao dynasty (907–1125)', *T'oung Pao*, vol. 72, 1986, pp. 44–91, clearly discerned and documented the multiplicity of lineages aggregated under 'Xiao', suggesting that Xiao (Hsiao) might have indicated a 'clan'. Pursey, 'Necropolitan elite', esp. pp. 156–179, very interestingly follows lineage differentiation and class stratification within 'Xiao' without deciding exactly what Xiao was (though he often uses the plural 'clans').

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Wangjiu[111]—were all inducted into the aristocracy when given the 'national surname' (guoxing 國興). Many more are revealed through the necropolis epitaphs. Aristocrats of Bohai origin were also evident, including the last acting king of Bohai, Da Yinzhuan (Dae Inseon, 大諲譔, r. 907–926), as early as the first decades of Kitan Liao statehood.[112] These aristocrats were the 'Kitan' of the Kitan Liao empire. The genealogical reforms proposed (and later rejected by the emperor) in 1074 would have fictionalized 'Yelü' and 'Xiao' as lineage surnames 姓 instead of status signifiers, and condemned the constant marriages between people of the same surname as improper. There is no need to characterize rejection of this proposal as nativist or revivalist. Such legislation might have been superfluous because Kitan naming provided lineage specificity that did not remain legible in Chinese. In any event, it would have dismantled the aristocracy by vaporizing the labels that identified it.

Rank, dependency, and identity in medieval northeast Asia

Han and *han'er*, similar to the more generic *fan*, were labels of subordination in the Kitan Liao order—the labels themselves were the history of these populations' dependency and the gifting of them to Kitan aristocrats. When captured or gifted, these populations were brought into group registries that were part of the patrimonial systems that persisted in a basic form from at least Xiongnu times to Qing. These patrimonies and the dependent populations within them were defined by the variable and, in some ways, elusive institution that here, for convenience, can be called the '*ordo*', best known in Chinese as the word that was used by the Kitans (*ordo*, in the *Liao shi, woluduo* 斡耳朵); this includes the 'estate' (*fu*) granted to Yelü Longyun after his transfer to Liaoning.[113] Its meaning for the Uighur empire and other medieval Turkic regimes was clearly that of a fixed installation, originally military, but eventually taking on the meaning of 'estate' or 'palace' (able to be passed as patrimony, as the space and population under the control of a specific owner, who could be anyone from the khan down to a designated local magnate). Through the Turkic regimes of the middle period the term *ordo*/*ordu* virtually always required some kind of central palace or fortification, thus Ordu-Balikh was the palace-town of the Uighur khaghans. In *Liao shi, ordo* appears more administrative than strictly territorial, and constitutes a grant (or recognized proprietorship) of people, herds, weapons, and other assets. It is also reflected throughout *Liao shi* as the registers (*zhang* 帳), which were originally lists

[111]Chen Zhaogun 陳昭衮, Wangjiu 王九, f. 1016, the year he claimed fame by riding and then killing a tiger during a hunt with Emperor Shengzong. *Liao shi* 81.

[112]Sawamoto, 'Kittan no tōchi kyū Bokkai ryō tōchi to Tōtan koku no kōzō', in Ulaxichun [Ulhicun], Aisingioro (爱新觉罗乌拉熙春) and Michimasa Yoshimoto (吉本道雅), *Shin shutsu Kittan shiryō no kenkyū* 新出契丹史料の研究 (Tokyo: Shūkō 松香堂書店, 2012). Wang Shanjun (王善军), 'Liaodai shijia Dazu wenhua huodong shulun 辽代世家大族文化活动述论', *Anhui shixue* 安徽史学, vol. 2006, no. 2, April 2006, pp. 19–23.

[113]The etymology of '*ordo*' and its very limited variants in eastern Eurasia has been speculatively traced to the Xiongnu, when it might have referred to either a temporary camp or a fixed command centre. Other etymologies are possible. See also Li Junyi 李俊义 and Dai Yuexi 戴岳曦, 'Liao shi Zhong woluduo mingcheng yan'ge kao《辽史》中斡鲁朵名称沿革考', *Chifeng xueyuan xuebao* 赤峰学院学报, vol. 2015, no. 9, 2015; Takai Yasunori 高井康典行, 'Orudo to hanjin オルド(斡魯朶)と藩鎮', *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究, vol. 61, no. 2, 2002, pp. 230–256.

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of household goods attached to nomadic camps. Cultural labels were used for populations grouped under patrimonial registries (as households, *hu*), while in *Liao shi* non-aristocratic populations who had not been distinguished by a history of servility and gifting—that is, people we would today refer to as 'Kitan'—were *zhenghu* (正戶, 'standard households').[114] This general framework, as a political organization encompassing populations, is important in understanding the differentiated histories of the descendants of Han Zhigu and Han Guangsi in the Kitan regime. These generations were not united by ethnicity, but separated by institutions of collective dependency and aristocratic ownership. The descendants of Han Kuangsi were released from the *ordo* (presumably the imperial *ordo*), but returned to it sometime in Derang's maturity because of an offence committed by some member of the lineage (a punishment visited upon aristocrats regardless of ancestry). Derang himself was given the imperial name, released from the palace *ordo*, inducted into the patriarchal chamber of the 'horizontal tents' (*hengzheng jifufang* 橫帳季父房), permitted to change his personal name, invested as a prince, and given his own land, residence, and tomb site, all of which either could have happened in quick succession after 1005, or could have been multiple aspects of a single event.[115] More of his relatives were released at the request of a later Kuangsi descendant.[116]

It is unclear how many terms accepted today as ethnonyms functioned before the early modern period more as indicators of rank or status.[117] The casualness with which identifying terms, or names (they can be difficult to unravel), for royals and aristocrats is consistent with a looseness in the ways that North Asian regimes generally approached questions of what would now be called autonyms.[118] What they called themselves, or what others called them, could be fungible to a degree that has puzzled modern historians, who live in an era of reified ethnicity and fastidiousness in group naming. As early as the Xiongnu it was evident that in communication with other regimes, especially China, there was a lack of consistency in distinguishing the names of ruling lineages from the names of dynasties (if they existed), from the names of federations or lineages among the aristocratic or military populations.[119] Identities

[114]The Dagur/Da'ur, who are genetic descendants of Kitans, may have a name derived from the Kitan root for 'centre, central' —or, I would suggest, 'middle'—and may have some semantic connection to this status *zhenghu*. See also András Róna-Tas, 'The Khitan names of the five capitals', *International Journal of Eurasian Linguistics*, vol. 1, 2019, pp. 98–124, p. 17.

[115]*Liao shi juan* 74; the phrasing suggests that all these events happened during the year 1005 (Tonghe 統和 22), but this was possibly the date of the announcement of Derang's elevation by Chengtian, and not the date at which each event took place. 二十二年, 從太后南征, 及河, 許宋成而還。徙王晉, 賜姓, 出宮籍, 隸橫帳季父房後, 乃改賜今名, 位親王上, 賜田宅及陪葬地

[116]See Crossley, 'Outside in', pp. 77, 79, 82.

[117]For a particularly precise examination of the mistaken imposition of an 'ethnic' meaning onto an institutional status, see Christopher Atwood, 'Some early inner Asian terms related to the imperial family and the Comitatus', Department of East Asian Languages and Civilisations, University of Pennsylvania Repository, 2013, pp. 53–57: https://repository.upenn.edu/ealc/14, [accessed 19 June 2024].

[118]This is a long-standing issue in the origins of the name 'Khitan', which may have been derived from a royal rank of the Northern Wei period. See Elina-Qian Xu, 'Historical development of the pre-dynastic Khitan', Publications of the Institute for Asian and African Studies 7, University of Helsinki, 2005, pp. 5–9, partly from Feng, 'Qidan ming hao kaoshi'.

[119]This has been explored in detail by Atwood, 'The Qai, the Khongai, and the names of the Xiōngnú'. One does not have to believe that names were sorted in such a systematic way as Atwood suggests

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appear to have been appended only irregularly, if at all, to names construed today as ethnonyms. The records suggest that among nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples identities were drawn from the spirits through whom they mediated their concerns, the war leaders for whom they would sacrifice their lives, and the patrimonies—basically constituted by *ordo*—to which they may have been entitled by direct inheritance, none of which correspond to what modern social science considers 'ethnicity'. They often referred to themselves corporately by whatever name would make sense to the readers at the other end of the correspondence—in the Chinese case, most likely to be *hu* of one category or another.

Scholars of language history, perhaps foremost among them Juha Janhunen and Andrew Shimunek, have done a great deal to demonstrate the entangling of languages across Northeast Asia and Mongolia,[120] which is inseparable from the entangling of rank designations. Christopher Beckwith suggested that Ashina—usually taken as the name of the ruling lineage of the Gokturk khaghanate[121]—was originally a rank name for a royal or an aristocrat, misconstrued in Chinese records as a lineage or tribal name.[122] Indeed, looking at Ashina as an aristocratic class with origins among the Särbor perhaps as early as the Xiongnu—but continuously dominating or resurfacing in the political structures of the Avars, Gokturks, and Khazars, and probably linked to the aristocracies of the Shiwei (who lived under Kitan Liao domination), Xi, Tangguts, Shatuo Turks, and Kitans—provides a simple way of narrating a vector of cultural development that was in many ways independent of the very wide spectrum of genetic and linguistic diversity that is amply demonstrable for the broadly confederated populations historically designated 'Xiongnu', 'Hun', 'Avar', 'Tabgach', 'Türk', 'Kitan', and so on. For the Kitans, this continuity was a conviction expressed in epitaphs, where aristocrats asserted their descent from Tagbach/Särbi rulers of the Northern Wei period (corroborated by histories and archaeology of the Five Dynasties period).[123] For

(see pp. 36–37) to appreciate the forceful demonstration of instability in the group and political names of Central Asia, Mongolia, and Northeast Asia.

[120]See particularly J. A. Janhunen, 'The unity and diversity of Altaic', *Annual Review of Linguistics*, vol. 9, no. 1 2023, pp. 135–154, in which 'Altaic' is presented not as a language family, or super-family, but in the style of a *sprachbund*. On the origins of Särbi and Mongolic languages (including Kitan), see Andrew Shimunek, *Languages of ancient southern Mongolia and North China: A historical-comparative study of the Serbi or Xianbei branch of the Serbi-Mongolic language family, with an analysis of northeastern frontier Chinese and Old Tibetan phonology* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017).

[121]Christopher Beckwith, 'The pronunciation, origin and meaning of A-shih-na in Early Old Turkic', in *Central Eurasia in the Middle Ages: Studies in honour of Peter B. Golden*, (eds) István Zimonyi and Osman Karatay (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), pp. 39–46; and Peter B. Golden, 'The ethnogonic tales of the Turks', *The Medieval History Journal*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2018, pp. 291–327.

[122]There is a Jin period Jurchen analogy to this in the 'clan' name Wanyan (完颜, Jurchen/Manchu Wanggiya) of the Jin imperial family. This appears at face value to come from Chinese *wangjia* 王家, meaning the royal family, because they were the aristocratic leaders of the Jurchens in the Kitan Liao era, before the founding of the Jurchen Jin empire and before the devising of the Jurchen script, but when Chinese writing was widely known. There is always the possibility that Manchu speakers later transformed a Jurchen name they did not understand into Wanggiya by folk etymology, since it was the Jin Jurchen imperial lineage name, but taking such liberties seems unlikely to me, on top of being unnecessary.

[123]Pursey, 'The necropolitan elite', p. 16, notes this in the instance of Yelü Yuzhi (耶律羽之, 890–941, whose famously well-stocked tomb has provided unusual insight into Liao-era material life.

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them, aristocratic life combining literacy in Chinese, practice of Turkic shamanism, falconry and hunting from horseback,[124] and belief in or at least patronage of Mahayana Buddhism was not a derivative cosmopolitanism but a stable culture linking Kitan-era aristocrats with their predecessors of three, four, or five centuries before.[125] Kitan aristocrats exhibited their habitation of this stable milieu from a very early point, as they had inherited it from the Northern Wei period. Abaoji knew Chinese, and facility in multiple languages was often noted as a virtue of Yelü 耶律 men (consistent with Jin Shizong's later praise of all men who were competent in more than one language).The *Liao shi* contains repeated praise for individuals proficient in both Kitan and Chinese.[126] Praise for being good at shooting from horseback and also loving ritual and Chinese literature was standard fare for aristocratic biographies in the *Liao shi*.[127] Emperor Xingzong (1016–1051) wrote poetry in Chinese. Abaoji's eldest son Yelü Bei led a life which was on one side that of a Kitan crown prince, on another a talented scholar and champion of Confucianism, on another a renegade who tried to create his own kingdom in Dan gur, and on another a fugitive painter sheltered by the Shatuo Turks who, under the name Li Zanhua 李贊華, produced the exquisite images that have indelibly identified the Kitans in global history.[128]

The apparent superfluity of collective names in the case of aristocrats may been produced by the fact that aristocratic identity was already well defined not only by formal status (in the Kitan case, usually membership in the 'horizontal tents' and use of the Yelü surname) but also by a cultural style. In the case of Kitan aristocrats it was inseparable from their critical political function, which was to weave together patrimonies and aristocratic property holders who might otherwise be separated by historical enmity, economic rivalries, disparate spirit veneration, language, or dialects.[129] It linked aristocrats of tenth- and eleventh-century Mongolia and Manchuria to the dynastic cultures of Northern Wei, Northern Zhou, Northern Qi, and Tang: with familiarity with Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism; with literacy in Chinese as well as local languages (if written); and with pastimes encompassing both hunting with

[124]Andrew Eisenberg, *Kingship in early medieval China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008); Arthur Wright, *The Sui dynasty* (New York: Knopf, 1979); Victor Cunrui Xiong, *Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty: His life, times and legacy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006); Mandy Rui-man Wu, 'Tombs of Xianbei conquerors and Central Asians in sixth century CE Northern China: A globalising perspective', in *The Routledge handbook of archaeology and globalisation*, (ed.) Tamar Hodos (London: Routledge, 2017).

[125]Some historians see the perpetuation of these tastes into the imperial periods as sound evidence of 'Sinicization' (even in the sense of 'assimilation'). See, for instance, Hok-lam Chan, 'From tribal chieftain to Sinitic emperor: Leadership contests and succession crises in the Jurchen-Jin state, 1115–1234', *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 33, no. 2, 1999, pp. 105–141. Such interpretations would be less problematic if imperial lineages in the regimes being referenced were not drawn from long-standing aristocratic enclaves that had incorporated Chinese cultural elements centuries before.

[126]*Liao shi juan* 81, 88, 95.

[127]As one of many examples, see the comment regarding Yelü Dici in *Liao shi Juan* 66: 敵刺善騎射, 頗好禮文.

[128]Biography in *Liao shi juan* 72; see also Crossley, 'Bohai/Parhae identity'.

[129]See Róna-Tas, 'The Khitan names of the five capitals', pp. 5–6, for comments regarding the 'horizontal tents' (橫帳) as part of the 'warp and woof' of the Kitan political tapestry; I would paraphrase the 'horizontal tents' of the imperial class as 'straddling' linguistic, economic, and the severe political fractures of the early Liao period.

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falcons and reciting Chinese poetry.[130] This was not a cultural pattern, whether 'hybrid' or 'cosmopolitan', that repeatedly and independently evolved in regimes bordering China. It may also not have been a continuing population (though elements may have had long histories). But it was a continuing tradition that was well exemplified in the Kitan aristocratic class, and in fact codified in obvious ways in the recorded utterances of Jin Shizong that have otherwise been interpreted as ethnic.

Possibly because reading and writing of Chinese, and knowledge of Chinese literature and arts, were so characteristic of these aristocratic classes who ruled some part of historical China, outside entities repeatedly identified these regimes as 'China'. During and after Northern Wei, Tabgach (and many variants) was a widely used name for the territory of northern China.[131] Something very similar was evident after the Kitan period, when 'Kitan' in various forms became a term referring to China.[132] This amalgamated identification of North China with Kitan was not limited to aristocrats. A Korean glossary that probably originated in Kitan times uses *qida* 乞大 (as pronounced in modern standard Chinese; Korean *goelda)* as a reference to the style of spoken language in northern China that was basically Chinese but with grammatical and lexical elements incorporated from Turkic and Särbi language as well as Kitan.[133] The same general phenomenon allowed the Jin and Yuan states, subsequently, to use *han* and *khitai* interchangeably.[134] This became a staple of Jurchen Jin law and administrative use. In effect *han* during the Jin period meant non-Jurchen, non-nomadic populations.[135] At least part of this merging of terms must have been inspired by the fact that the Kitan polity (the source of virtually all the epigraphy by which the language is known) developed limited vocabulary referring to itself. The language (as a noun more than a proper noun) was generally referred by Kitan words with the *qid.* root, but instances in which the term applies to people—as contrasted to a language or a state—remain ambiguous, at best. This does not mean people were never indicated, it means the designation of a people by this term was not a priority and, perhaps, was conceptually useless.

[130]Although falconry is often mentioned in relation to Tang aristocrats, in particular, as if to demonstrate distinct influence from Central Asia or Mongolia, it is very old in China and, if anything, signifies the continuous cross-cultural integration between China, particularly western China, and the Turkic and Särbi worlds. Edward H. Schaefer, 'Falconry in T'ang times', in *Critical readings on Tang China*, (ed.) Paul W. Kroll (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2018), vol. 3, pp. 1504–1539.

[131]See Chen Hao, 'Competing narratives: A comparative study of Chinese sources with the Old Turkic inscriptions', *Studia Uralo-Altaica*, vol. 53, 2020, pp. 59–65.

[132]Atwood, 'The Qai, Khongai and the names of the Xiongnú'; Charles Holcombe, 'The Tabgatch empire and the idea of China', *The Historian*, vol. 84, no. 2, pp. 242–261.

[133]The first edition of *Laoqida* (around 1346–1423) was only available in Chinese characters. Cui Shizhen added a Korean translation to 'Translator *Laoqida*' (a few years before 1517). A 1670 edition with Chinese phonetic annotation, *Qingyu Lao Qida* 清語老乞大, has been edited and translated by Zhuang Jifa 莊吉發, *Qingyu Lao Qida yizhu* 清語老乞大譯注 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 2014). The earliest version recorded the speech of the Liaodong area (that is, the area owned by Han Derang). Li Taizhu, *Lao Qida sizhong banben yuyan yanjiu* 老乞大语序研究 (Beijing: Yuwen Press, 2003); Alexander Vovin, 'Once again on Khitan words in Chinese-Khitan mixed verses', *Acta Orientalia*, vol. 56, 2003, pp. 237–244.

[134]Crossley, 'Outside in', pp. 81–88.

[135]See Jia Jingyan 贾敬颜, 'Qidan—Hanren zhi bieming' 契丹—漢人之別名, *Zhongyang minzu daxue xuebao* 中央民族大學學報, no. 5, 1987, pp. 20–22; and Fei Xiaotong 费孝通 (ed.), "'*Hanren*" kao 汉人考', in *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yiti geju* 中华民族多元一体格局 (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 1999).

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In the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries we may theorize 'ethnicity' as a durable and significant part of identity—perhaps even its whole—but in tenth- and eleventh-century Eurasia there is little evidence this was true. With respect to Kitan Liao, the evidence is that Yelü, Xiao, *han*, and *fan* were all status or rank terms, and subject to mutation as status itself changed. Their connection to patrilineal descent, and particularly to patrimonial rights, is clear, but this does not equate to racial or ethnic consciousness. The administrative dynamics of the Turkic and Kitan *ordo*, and the practice of linking histories of conquest, ownership, and exchange to cultural labelling of dependent populations provided elements that ultimately contributed to a modern social science of objectified ethnic identities. In the early modern period, the construction, enforcement, and historicization of selected cultural identifications were essential for the management of conquest and occupation, and became even more important in periods of transition from occupation to civil government; later, it fitted racial concepts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[136] By the nineteenth century, the result was the naturalization of concepts of 'nationality' and 'ethnicity' in academic discourse, and these interventions continue to animate retrospective projections onto societies before the early modern period. But the imposition of the concepts of 'ethnicity,' 'hybridity', and 'cosmopolitanism' on the medieval period and earlier is demonstrably done free of the evidence from epigraphy, archaeology, and written history.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

[136]Crossley, *Hammer and anvil*, esp. pp. 233–273; Theo David Goldberg, *Racist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

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