T'ang Studies 25 (2007)

CHINESE "QAGHANS" APPOINTED BY THE TÜRKS

Michael R. Drompp
Rhodes College

Students of China's traditional foreign relations are well acquainted with the Chinese phrase *yi yi zhi yi* 以夷制夷, usually translated as "using 'barbarians' to control 'barbarians.'" Rather than defining a single specific policy, this phrase came to encompass a set of policies, which can be grouped into three basic categories: (1) employing submitted foreigners as troops within China's military establishment to assist with a dynasty's defense against foreign powers; (2) creating or exploiting divisions within a single foreign polity in order to weaken it; and (3) pitting one foreign power against another in order to weaken one or both of them. The first of these was proposed as a specific policy by Chao Cuo 鼂錯 (d. 154 B.C.E.), an official of China's Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) who sought to find methods through which China could cope with the threat of its powerful northern neighbors, the nomadic Xiong-nu 匈奴.[1] Later, the term was expanded to include the two additional approaches.[2] In the case of the second and third categories, a common method of creating divisions among China's enemies was for an emperor in China to show favor to one foreign leader or polity over another. Such favor could take many forms, including political alliances (some of which were affirmed through marital connections), preferential trade arrangements, and the granting of titles. While by no means always successful, this set of techniques remained an important component of imperial China's foreign policy repertoire.

The frequent use of the term *yi yi zhi yi* and the regular study of its application have tended to focus on Chinese actions, and this has often obscured the other side of the coin: policies employed by China's neighbors to manipulate the "Middle Kingdom" by using sometimes surprisingly similar techniques. This essay seeks

[1] Ying-shih Yü, *Trade and Expansion in Han China: A Study in the Structure of Sino-Barbarian Economic Relations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 14–15. See also Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 202–4. For an account of Chao Cuo's life, see Michael Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods (221 BC–AD 24)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 27–29. Note that I have employed hyphens (not normally used in *pinyin* Romanization) as a sort of "shorthand" to indicate non-Chinese names in Chinese transcription and thereby distinguish them from native Chinese (and native Turkic) names and terms.

[2] Yü, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, 15–16. Yü refers to the second policy as a form of "divide and rule," but, in many instances at least, this gives too much agency to the Chinese. It was more typical for Chinese strategists to exploit an existing division than to create a new one.

to examine some specific cases in which China's neighbors sought to turn the tables on the old policy of *yi yi zhi yi* through the practice that has been called *yi Han zhi Han* 以漢制漢, "using Chinese to control Chinese."[3] Although not nearly as well known as its Chinese counterpart, this technique was employed by some monarchs, particularly rulers of nomadic empires, in order to make political gains for themselves by weakening, limiting, or otherwise compromising Chinese power.

Several important examples of this general phenomenon can be seen in the foreign policy of the Türks (*Tu-jue* 突厥 in Chinese), who rose to power on the Mongolian Plateau in the middle of the sixth century. When the Türks first established their state in 552, China was divided among competing dynasties. In the north, the rival Tuo-ba 拓跋 (*Tabghach* in Old Turkic) dynasties of Eastern Wei and Western Wei (later Northern Qi and Northern Zhou respectively) both bordered the new Türk polity, which expanded rapidly in many directions through the military subjugation of other peoples. Each of the Tuo-ba states sought an alliance with the Türks, and the latter played both sides against one another to their own advantage.[4] The situation was so beneficial—and so lucrative—to the Türks that one of their rulers, Taspar/Tatpar (*Ta-bo* 他鉢 in Chinese)[5] Qaghan (r. 572–580) is said to have commented, "So long as my two sons to the south remain filial and obedient, what worry have I of lacking anything?"[6] From the very beginning of the history of their empire, the Türks exploited the existing division between the two Tuo-ba states in North China in order to gain benefits for themselves.

The situation changed radically, however, with the reunification—indeed, the regeneration—of China under the Sui dynasty (581–618), completed in 589 with the conquest of the southern Chinese state of Chen. Not only was China united under the rule of a single emperor for the first time in nearly three centuries, but the power of the Türks had been split between two distinct and sometimes rival qaghanates, East and West, at approximately the same time. A unified China now manipulated this situation effectively in a classic example of *yi yi zhi yi*. Not only was the rivalry between the two Türk qaghanates exploited, but the Sui leadership also found ways to drive wedges of discord among the elites of each qaghanate.[7] While this did not completely eliminate the threat of the Türks, it did prove a reasonably beneficial approach for the new dynasty in China. The Sui dynasty's strength was perhaps at its greatest when the Eastern Türk ruler Qi-min 啟民 Qaghan (r. 599–608) accepted the posture of a Sui vassal and was favored by the emperor with marriage to the Princess Yicheng 義成 in 599.[8] Sui power, however, did not last long. As the Sui empire crumbled under the weight of its disastrous campaigns against the kingdom of Koguryŏ and other problems, the power of the Eastern Türks began to revive. Indeed, Chinese sources inform us that under Shi-bi 始畢 Qaghan (r. 609–619), the Eastern Türks were stronger than any nomadic power to China's north had ever been.[9] It is under Shi-bi's reign that we again see examples of the policy of "using Chinese to control Chinese."

As noted above, one method through which rulers in China sought to employ the second category under the rubric *yi yi zhi yi*—i.e., the creation or exploitation of divisions within a single foreign polity in order to weaken it—was the granting of titles. While this important element in China's diplomatic repertoire was seen as a regular means of treating with foreign leaders, it was not always seen through the lens of *yi yi zhi yi*, as titles could also be granted to promote friendly relations with a foreign monarch. But in some cases, this practice fit squarely within the policy of "using 'barbarians' against 'barbarians,'" as the granting of titles could, by showing Chinese favor to one foreign leader, strengthen him at the expense of his internal rivals. The Sui dynasty had in fact employed this technique to attempt to sow discord among the Türks.

[3] Lin Enxian 林恩顯 applied this term specifically to Türk efforts to influence Chinese political contests. See his *Tu-jue yanjiu* 突厥研究 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1988), especially 270–72.

[4] It can be argued that North China's division into two competing states, which occurred in 534, was a major factor contributing to the Türks' ability to overthrow their Rou-ran 柔然 overlords and establish a new polity; see Michael R. Drompp, "Imperial State Formation in Inner Asia: The Early Turkic Empires (6th to 9th Centuries)," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 58 (2005): 103–4.

[5] The Old Turkic form of this name is unknown. We have only the Chinese transcription Ta-bo found throughout various Chinese sources and the Sogdian form from the Bugut inscription of the late sixth century. Unfortunately, the reading of the latter is contested and could yield either Taspar or Tatpar; see S. Kljaštornyj and V. A. Livšic, "The Sogdian Inscription of Bugut Revised," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 26 (1972): 73–74 and 86 as well as Takao Moriyasu 森安孝夫 and Ayuda Ochir, eds., *Mongorukoku genson iseki, hibun chōsa kenkyū hōkoku* モンゴル国現存遺蹟・碑文調査研究報告 (Osaka: The Society of Central Eurasian Studies, 1999), 122–25.

[6] *Zhou shu*, 50.911 (hereafter *ZS*); all references to the twenty-four dynastic histories are to the Beijing Zhonghua shuju edition. The use of the word "sons" seems to imply that Taspar/Tatpar saw himself in a position superior to that of the two Tuo-ba monarchs who sought his favor. For an argument against such an interpretation, see Wu Yugui 吳玉貴, *Tu-jue Hanguo yu Sui Tang guanxi shi yanjiu* 突厥汗國與隋唐關係史研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998), 86–88.

[7] For an overview, see Pan Yihong, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan: Sui-Tang China and Its Neighbors* (Bellingham: Western Washington University Center for East Asian Studies, 1997), 100–32.

[8] *Sui shu*, 84.1872–73 (hereafter *SS*).

[9] *Jiu Tang shu*, 194A.5153 (hereafter *JTS*).

The practice of granting titles to foreign leaders was regarded, at least in terms of China's official internal rhetoric, as a type of appointment (*cefeng* 冊封) bestowed by the emperor on an inferior. But what these titles implied to the foreign leaders who often sought and received them is a complex question.[10] How, for example, nomad rulers who received titles from a Chinese emperor viewed their relationship is not always entirely clear, but it is unlikely that they regarded the Chinese ruler as their overlord, particularly during periods of strength. Nomad rulers, in most cases of appointment, took no orders from the emperor and maintained their independence, acting in concert with him only when it served their interests as well. It seems equally unlikely that Chinese emperors believed that through such appointments they could actually command their nomadic "inferiors." Instead, these Chinese appointments served an ideological purpose for the bestower as well as the recipient, helping to strengthen their respective positions and, it could be hoped, lead to an era of peaceful relations between the two. Such titles enhanced a nomad ruler's prestige and strengthened his legitimacy, while at the same time signaling the nomad ruler's recognition of the emperor's right to bestow them. Such titles often meant little or nothing in terms of real power—that is, in terms of a Chinese monarch's ability to control nomadic peoples. Nevertheless, Inner Asian rulers regularly sought Chinese titles of confirmation; for the Türks and many other Inner Asian peoples, the concept of independent sovereignty was not incompatible with this practice.

Chinese accounts of this type of relationship are of course colored by China's own internal needs. The notion of "appointment" of foreign rulers was useful to maintain the theory that the Chinese emperor, the Son of Heaven, was lord of All-under-Heaven (*tianxia* 天下). This implied Chinese dominance, or potential for dominance, over the entire outside world. As has been noted, such appointments were in fact just one of many ways in which the Chinese attempted to manipulate or influence their neighbors. Yet while studies often emphasize the Chinese worldview that placed China and its ruler in a superior position to all others, Chinese imperial rhetoric was in many ways quite flexible in this regard. During periods of nomad strength, for example, the Chinese court could employ dramatically different language for internal and external use. The emperor could maintain a posture of superiority over foreign leaders in communications with his own people while still maintaining cordial (and much more symmetrical) relations with foreign rulers beyond his control.[11] The granting of titles of appointment thus

[10] See, for example, the discussion in Wang Zhenping, *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals: China-Japan Relations in the Han-Tang Period* (Honolulu: The Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 20–32.

[11] For a case study, see Michael R. Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire: A Documentary History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 159–95.

could be employed as a rhetorical device with important political implications and applications, both internal and external. Such rhetoric could obscure political realities when it suited Chinese needs.

In all their communications, whether internal or external, Chinese emperors normally allowed only themselves to be called by the term *huangdi* 皇帝; foreign potentates were not granted that distinction. In the rhetoric of the Türks, however, the situation is a bit more complicated. The Old Turkic term *qaghan* (*ke-han* 可汗 in Chinese) is well known; it was employed by the Türks, and indeed by some earlier peoples ruling over parts of Inner Asia, as the title of their supreme and independent sovereign. The Türks used this term to designate other independent sovereigns as well; the eighth-century Old Turkic inscriptions refer to the Chinese emperor as a qaghan, and also apply that title to the rulers of the Türgesh, Kirghiz, and Tibetan peoples.[12] This might seem to suggest a sense of equal status among these particular rulers, including a concept of parity between the Chinese "Son of Heaven" and the "Heaven-like and Heaven-born" (Old Turkic *Tengriteg Tengride bolmiš*) Türk *qaghan*. The situation is further complicated by the fact that among the highest ranks of the Türk elites, more than one person could hold the title of qaghan at any given time; the title was often given to important persons whose positions—and power—were not far below that of the reigning supreme qaghan. In a consideration of Türk titles, the Chinese encyclopedia *Tong dian* (completed in 801) notes the presence of what we might term "subordinate qaghans" among the Türks, including the "wolf qaghan" (Old Turkic *böri qaghan*, Chinese *fu-lin* 附鄰 *ke-han*) and the "house qaghan" (Old Turkic *ev qaghan*, Chinese *yi* 遺 *ke-han*).[13] Other sources show that these were only a few of the various "subordinate qaghans" that existed in the Türk state; in many cases, these men were essentially highly autonomous viceroys with significant political and military authority.[14]

While the Chinese have a long and relatively well-known history of granting titles to foreign leaders, there is far less evidence of the reverse. Nevertheless, in the

[12] Talât Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1968); see 232–33, 237, 245, and 250 for the Chinese emperor (Old Turkic *Tabghach qaghan*); 234, 236–37, 243, 246–47, and 250–51 for the Türgesh ruler; 234, 235, and 237 for the Kirghiz ruler; and 237 for the Tibetan *btsampo*.

[13] Du You, *Tong dian* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 197.1068. The normal Chinese transcription of Old Turkic *böri* is not *fu-lin* but *bu-li* 步利 (or 步離).

[14] See Michael R. Drompp, "Supernumerary Sovereigns: Superfluity and Mutability in the Elite Power Structure of the Early Türks (Tu-jue)," in Gary Seaman and Daniel Marks, eds., *Rulers from the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery* (Los Angeles: Ethnographics Press, 1991), 92–115.

The practice of granting titles to foreign leaders was regarded, at least in terms of China's official internal rhetoric, as a type of appointment (*cefeng* 冊封) bestowed by the emperor on an inferior. But what these titles implied to the foreign leaders who often sought and received them is a complex question.[10] How, for example, nomad rulers who received titles from a Chinese emperor viewed their relationship is not always entirely clear, but it is unlikely that they regarded the Chinese ruler as their overlord, particularly during periods of strength. Nomad rulers, in most cases of appointment, took no orders from the emperor and maintained their independence, acting in concert with him only when it served their interests as well. It seems equally unlikely that Chinese emperors believed that through such appointments they could actually command their nomadic "inferiors." Instead, these Chinese appointments served an ideological purpose for the bestower as well as the recipient, helping to strengthen their respective positions and, it could be hoped, lead to an era of peaceful relations between the two. Such titles enhanced a nomad ruler's prestige and strengthened his legitimacy, while at the same time signaling the nomad ruler's recognition of the emperor's right to bestow them. Such titles often meant little or nothing in terms of real power—that is, in terms of a Chinese monarch's ability to control nomadic peoples. Nevertheless, Inner Asian rulers regularly sought Chinese titles of confirmation; for the Türks and many other Inner Asian peoples, the concept of independent sovereignty was not incompatible with this practice.

Chinese accounts of this type of relationship are of course colored by China's own internal needs. The notion of "appointment" of foreign rulers was useful to maintain the theory that the Chinese emperor, the Son of Heaven, was lord of All-under-Heaven (*tianxia* 天下). This implied Chinese dominance, or potential for dominance, over the entire outside world. As has been noted, such appointments were in fact just one of many ways in which the Chinese attempted to manipulate or influence their neighbors. Yet while studies often emphasize the Chinese worldview that placed China and its ruler in a superior position to all others, Chinese imperial rhetoric was in many ways quite flexible in this regard. During periods of nomad strength, for example, the Chinese court could employ dramatically different language for internal and external use. The emperor could maintain a posture of superiority over foreign leaders in communications with his own people while still maintaining cordial (and much more symmetrical) relations with foreign rulers beyond his control.[11] The granting of titles of appointment thus could be employed as a rhetorical device with important political implications and applications, both internal and external. Such rhetoric could obscure political realities when it suited Chinese needs.

In all their communications, whether internal or external, Chinese emperors normally allowed only themselves to be called by the term *huangdi* 皇帝; foreign potentates were not granted that distinction. In the rhetoric of the Türks, however, the situation is a bit more complicated. The Old Turkic term *qaghan* (*ke-han* 可汗 in Chinese) is well known; it was employed by the Türks, and indeed by some earlier peoples ruling over parts of Inner Asia, as the title of their supreme and independent sovereign. The Türks used this term to designate other independent sovereigns as well; the eighth-century Old Turkic inscriptions refer to the Chinese emperor as a qaghan, and also apply that title to the rulers of the Türgesh, Kirghiz, and Tibetan peoples.[12] This might seem to suggest a sense of equal status among these particular rulers, including a concept of parity between the Chinese "Son of Heaven" and the "Heaven-like and Heaven-born" (Old Turkic *Tengriteg Tengride bolmiš*) Türk *qaghan*. The situation is further complicated by the fact that among the highest ranks of the Türk elites, more than one person could hold the title of qaghan at any given time; the title was often given to important persons whose positions—and power—were not far below that of the reigning supreme qaghan. In a consideration of Türk titles, the Chinese encyclopedia *Tong dian* (completed in 801) notes the presence of what we might term "subordinate qaghans" among the Türks, including the "wolf qaghan" (Old Turkic *böri qaghan*, Chinese *fu-lin* 附鄰 *ke-han*) and the "house qaghan" (Old Turkic *ev qaghan*, Chinese *yi* 遺 *ke-han*).[13] Other sources show that these were only a few of the various "subordinate qaghans" that existed in the Türk state; in many cases, these men were essentially highly autonomous viceroys with significant political and military authority.[14]

While the Chinese have a long and relatively well-known history of granting titles to foreign leaders, there is far less evidence of the reverse. Nevertheless, in the

[10] See, for example, the discussion in Wang Zhenping, *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals: China-Japan Relations in the Han-Tang Period* (Honolulu: The Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 20–32.

[11] For a case study, see Michael R. Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire: A Documentary History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 159–95.

[12] Talât Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1968); see 232–33, 237, 245, and 250 for the Chinese emperor (Old Turkic *Tabghach qaghan*); 234, 236–37, 243, 246–47, and 250–51 for the Türgesh ruler; 234, 235, and 237 for the Kirghiz ruler; and 237 for the Tibetan *btsampo*.

[13] Du You, *Tong dian* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 197.1068. The normal Chinese transcription of Old Turkic *böri* is not *fu-lin* but *bu-li* 步利 (or 步離).

[14] See Michael R. Drompp, "Supernumerary Sovereigns: Superfluity and Mutability in the Elite Power Structure of the Early Türks (Tu-jue)," in Gary Seaman and Daniel Marks, eds., *Rulers from the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery* (Los Angeles: Ethnographics Press, 1991), 92–115.

history of the Türks, we do find some surprising examples of nomads attempting to manipulate the political situation in China through the granting of titles to Chinese leaders. It is to this particular subject that we now turn our attention: those rare occasions on which powerful Türk rulers sought to employ the granting of titles in order to meddle in the politics of China. For example, when the state of Northern Qi was destroyed by its rival, Northern Zhou, Taspar/Tatpar Qaghan contributed to the instability of the situation by recognizing the Northern Qi prince Gao Shaoyi 高紹義 as Emperor of Qi (Chinese *Qi di* 齊帝) in 577; indeed, the Chinese official chronicle *Zhou shu* 周書 uses the verb *li* 立, "to set up, establish," for the Türk ruler's act.[15] Some decades later, after the Sui state had crumbled, Chu-luo 處羅 Qaghan (r. 619–620) gave refuge to various notables of the Sui court and recognized the grandson of Sui Yangdi 煬帝 (r. 604–618), Yang Zhengdao 楊政道, as "King of Sui" (Chinese *Sui wang* 隋王) in 620.[16]

The examples above involve a Türk ruler giving support to a Chinese claimant to the throne by recognizing him through the employment of Chinese titles such as "emperor" or "king." An unexpected form of Türk appointment, and the focus of this article, is that in which the titles granted to Chinese leaders contained Turkic elements. These are few in number and occur, so far as is known, at only two particular moments in history: the years of the transition from the Sui dynasty to that of Tang, and again at the time of the Zhou interregnum of Empress Wu 武 (r. 690–705). Despite the apparent infrequency of this form of Türk interference in Chinese politics, an examination of these events can shed some light on Türk notions of sovereignty as well as on the history of Türk-Chinese relations. I should note that this article will not consider those rare cases when established and powerful Chinese emperors themselves made use of the title qaghan.[17]

The first known appointments of Chinese "qaghans" occurred at the time of the collapse of the Sui dynasty, when several contenders for the Chinese throne,

[15] *ZS*, 50.912. See also *Bei Qi shu*, 13.156–57.

[16] *JTS*, 194A.5154 and Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1956), 188.5878 (hereafter *ZZTJ*). Chu-luo Qaghan should not be confused with an earlier Western Türk qaghan of the same name (r. 603–611).

[17] The best known example is the title "Heavenly Qaghan" (Chinese *Tian Ke-han* 天可汗) assumed by Tang Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649) in 630; for a discussion of this, see Pan Yihong, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan*, 179–83. Far less well understood is the term Moyuan 莫緣 Qaghan, used by the Türk ruler (and Sui ally) Qi-min Qaghan to refer to the emperor Sui Wendi 文帝 (r. 581–604); see *SS*, 84.1873–74. For discussions of possible interpretations of this term, see Liu Mau-tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten zur Geschichte der Ost-Türken (T'u-küe)*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1958), 2:535 n. 336 as well as Mori Masao 護雅夫, "Tokketsu no Keimin Kakan no jōhyōbun no bunshō" 突厥の啓民可汗の上表文の文章, *Toyō Gakuhō* 48.1 (June 1965): 51–53.

including the Tang founder Li Yuan 李淵 (Tang Gaozu 高祖, r. 618–626), received support from the Eastern Türks. At this time the powerful Eastern Türk ruler Shi-bi Qaghan attempted to take advantage of the chaos in North China, while various anti-Sui rebels in North China sought to avail themselves of the Türks' strength to bolster their position. The Türks worked to prevent, or manipulate, the restoration of stability in North China in a number of ways, including (as noted above) granting asylum to the refugee Sui court.[18] More important for our purposes here, Shi-bi Qaghan granted titles to some claimants to the Chinese throne. Li Yuan was not one of those, but the question of his reliance on, and implied subservience to, Shi-bi Qaghan is still debated by historians, particularly those who would prefer to minimize Türk involvement in the founding of one of China's most famous dynasties. But let us look at those Chinese leaders—ultimately unsuccessful—who accepted the title of *qaghan* from the Türks.

The first case is that of Liu Wuzhou 劉武周, a Sui official who murdered his superior, the governor of the important northern town of Mayi 馬邑, in the spring of 617 and approached the Eastern Türks for support after claiming the governorship for himself.[19] After his submission to Shi-bi Qaghan, he received two distinguishing marks to indicate his status as well as his close relationship to the Türks. One of these was a title; Liu was named Dingyang 定楊 Qaghan, a hybrid appellation of rather unusual character. The first element is Chinese: *ding* means "to settle, pacify," while Yang was the family name of the Sui emperors—and hence analogous to the imperial A-shi-na 阿史那 clan of the Türks. The element *qaghan* is Turkic. The title thus means "the qaghan who pacifies the Yang family" and as such is highly symbolic, suggesting that Liu would defeat the Sui forces and pacify the realm.[20] In addition to this somewhat peculiar title, which implied a high level of autonomy (*qaghan*) along with a command, or perhaps a prophecy (*dingyang*), Shi-bi also gave Liu a wolf's-head standard, known to have been an important part

[18] *ZZTJ*, 188.5878 and 5896.

[19] Biographies of Liu Wuzhou may be found in *JTS*, 55.2252–55 and *Xin Tang shu*, 86.3711–13 (hereafter *XTS*). The account given here is based on these sources as well as *ZZTJ*, 183.5718–19, 5723–24 and188.5882–83.

[20] According to a note to *ZZTJ*, 183.5723, "Yang" refers to Yangzhou 楊州, but the significance of Yangzhou is nowhere explained, and this interpretation is particularly problematic since I can find no evidence for a Yangzhou (written with this "Yang") at this time. According to the contemporary account of the Tang founding by Wen Daya 溫大雅, Liu Wuzhou proclaimed himself emperor (*Tianzi*) and "called his state Dingyang" (*guo hao Dingyang* 國號定楊); Wen does not link this title to the Türks. See Wen Daya, *Da Tang chuangye qiju zhu* 大唐創業起居注 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 1.4. Although the matter is not entirely clear, the interpretation of "Yang" here referring to the Sui imperial family seems by far the most compelling; see Wu Yugui, *Tu-jue Hanguo yu Sui Tang guanxi shi yanjiu*, 164.

of the imperial insignia of the Türks. This symbolic use of the wolf hearkened to their mythic past in which a numinous she-wolf saved the Türks from annihilation and so was regarded as an ancestress of their ruling clan.[21]

After receiving Shi-bi's support, Liu Wuzhou boldly arrogated to himself the title of emperor (*huangdi*) and gave his wife the title of empress (Chinese *huanghou* 皇后); he also announced a new reign era, Tianxing 天興.[22] All of these acts indicated Liu's aspiration for the Chinese throne. It is also recorded that Shi-bi Qaghan called Liu Wuzhou "Dingyang Son of Heaven,"[23] but this may be a later interpretation—i.e., a translation of "Dingyang Qaghan." Liu received military assistance from the Türks and led Türk troops, but was eventually defeated by Tang forces. He then was forced to flee north to the protection of the Türks; although he secretly made plans to return to his base at Mayi, this was discovered by the Türks, who put him to death in about 622.[24]

A second case comes from the same period and involved Liang Shidu 梁師都 of the northern city of Shuofang 朔方.[25] Liang also rebelled against the Sui in the spring of 617, after which he called himself emperor of the state of Liang and announced a new reign era, Yonglong 永隆. After allying with the Türks later that same year, he was granted the title Tardu Bilge Qaghan (Chinese *Da-du Pi-jia* 大度毗伽 *Ke-han*) by Shi-bi Qaghan.[26] This title contains no Chinese elements. Tardu, the meaning (and precise Turkic—or Turkicized—form) of which is not known, was not only the name of a famous Türk ruler, but is also found in the titles of other Türk elites.[27] Old Turkic *bilge*, meaning "wise," is a well-known word

[21] On this particular myth, see Denis Sinor, "The Legendary Origin of the Türks," in Egle Victoria Žygas and Peter Voorheis, eds., *Folklorica: Festschrift for Felix J. Oinas* (Bloomington: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1982), 223–57. The symbolic power of the wolf's-head standard was such that it was also used by the Uighurs, a Turkic people who formed an empire in Mongolia in the middle of the eighth century after the collapse of the Türk Empire—which they helped to overthrow; see *XTS*, 217A.6115.

[22] *JTS*, 55.2253. See also *XTS*, 86.3712.

[23] *ZZTJ*, 183.5724.

[24] *JTS*, 55.2254–55 and *ZZTJ*, 188.5882–83. According to the former source, Liu's "career" as a rebel encompassed six years, placing his death around 622. The latter source, however, indicates 620 as the year of Liu's death.

[25] Biographies of Liang Shidu may be found in *JTS*, 56.2280–81 and *XTS*, 87.3730–31.

[26] *JTS*, 56.2280.

[27] See Edouard Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) Occidentaux: Recueillis et commentés, suivi de notes additionelles* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, n.d.), 100 and 362. The name is given in several forms in Chinese transcription, most typically Da-tou 達頭. The form Tardu has been suggested on the basis of evidence from Greek sources, where it is found as Τάρδος; see Gyula

that is also found in the titles of many Türk leaders.

As in the case of Liu Wuzhou, Shi-bi Qaghan granted Liang Shidu a wolf's-head standard.[28] It is also recorded that he referred to Liang as "Jieshi 解事 Son of Heaven."[29] This seems to be an attempt to give a Chinese rendering of the Turkic title "Bilge Qaghan," as Chinese *jieshi* means "understanding, clever," and hence is analogous to Old Turkic *bilge*, while "Son of Heaven" refers to the title *qaghan*. As the name or term Tardu may not be of Turkic origin, and as its meaning is (and likely was) unknown, it makes sense that a Chinese "translation" of the title granted to Liang Shidu would omit any reference to this term and so be the one mentioned in the Chinese sources.

After the newly established Tang dynasty had enjoyed numerous successes in its efforts to bring stability to North China and had pacified many rival rebel leaders, Liang Shidu was gradually abandoned by some of his own generals. In fear of losing influence, he sent an envoy to the new Türk ruler Chu-luo Qaghan, offering to serve as a guide for the qaghan's troops in an attack on China. Chu-luo agreed and prepared a multi-pronged (and multi-ethnic) attack that was called off at the last minute due to Chu-luo's sudden death.[30] Under constant Tang harassment, Liang was forced to seek asylum with the new ruler of the Türks, Illig (Chinese *Xie-li* 頡利) Qaghan (r. 620–630). There, Liang is said to have "incessantly" encouraged the Türks to attack China and seems to have found Illig Qaghan sympathetic in his hostility for the Tang dynasty. But Illig Qaghan himself was in a precarious position, and as his own realm moved closer to collapse, the Tang dynasty renewed its efforts to eliminate Liang Shidu. Liang was finally killed in 628 by one of his own relatives, who then submitted to the Tang.[31]

The cases of Liu Wuzhou and Liang Shidu are the only clear ones in which the title of qaghan was granted by the Eastern Türks to a Chinese leader at the time of the Sui-Tang transition. Another Chinese rebel, Liu Jizhen 劉季真, depended on the Türks and called himself Tu-li 突利 Qaghan; he later joined forces with Liu Wuzhou.[32] Liu Zhizhen was not a particularly significant rebel leader, however, and seems to have taken the title Tu-li Qaghan of his own accord. Tu-li Qaghan was an important Turkic title held by several Türk leaders, including two "subordinate

Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 2:299.

[28] *JTS*, 56.2280.

[29] *ZZTJ*, 183.5724 and *XTS*, 87.3730.

[30] *JTS*, 56.2280.

[31] *JTS*, 56.2281 and *ZZTJ*, 192.6050.

[32] Biographies of Liu Jizhen may be found in *JTS*, 56.2281–82 and *XTS*, 87.3732.

qaghans" who exercised significant power within the Türk state.[33] Another Chinese rebel, Guo Zihe 郭子和 (later granted the Tang imperial surname of Li 李), sent his younger brother to the Eastern Türks as a hostage to gain their support.[34] While a client of the Türks, Guo refused to accept Shi-bi Qaghan's offer of the title Pingyang 平陽 Son of Heaven, and so was given the title Kül(i) Shad (Chinese *Wu-li She* 屋利設, with *wu* an error for *qu* 屈).[35] Pingyang is essentially identical in meaning to the term Dingyang found in Liu Wuzhou's title, as Chinese *ping* also has the meaning "to pacify, settle." As with Liu Wuzhou, the Türk ruler sought to imply that Guo's task was to defeat the Yang family. The more modest title that Guo ultimately accepted is entirely Turkic and contains elements common to many Türk titles from this era. Old Turkic *kül* (or *küli*) is well known as an element in many Old Turkic names or titles.[36] Old Turkic *shad* was a prestigious title, near in dignity to *qaghan*, as it typically was granted to only a small number of the ruler's closest male relatives; it implied significant power, giving the bearer authority and responsibilities akin to those of a viceroy.[37] Finally, many other aspirants for the throne also accepted support from the Türks and received titles from them at this time. These include the rebels Xue Ju 薛舉, Dou Jiande 竇建德, Wang Shichong 王世充, Li Gui 李軌, and Gao Kaidao 高開道. The available sources do not specify the titles that were granted to them, however, so we cannot know if they were also named as qaghans; the *Sui shu* informs us that all of these men styled themselves as vassals (*chen* 臣) of the Türks and received titles from them.[38] It

[33] Drompp, "Supernumerary Sovereigns," 99–102. The Old Turkic form of Chinese *Tu-li* has not been conclusively established.

[34] Biographies of Guo [Li] Zihe may be found in *JTS*, 56.2282–83 and *XTS*, 92.3804. The former claims that Guo sent his son as a hostage to the Türks, but both agree that it was Guo's younger brother who was imprisoned by Chu-luo Qaghan when the Türk ruler was displeased by Guo Zihe's actions.

[35] *ZZTJ*, 183.5724.

[36] Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 715.

[37] Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*, 866.

[38] *SS*, 84.1876. It has been asserted that all of these men were granted the title of qaghan; see Jonathan Karam Skaff, "Survival in the Frontier Zone: Comparative Perspectives on Identity and Political Allegiance in China's Inner Asian Borderlands during the Sui-Tang Dynastic Transition (617–630)," *Journal of World History* 15 (2004): 125. The language of the source is ambiguous: *shou qi ke-han zhi hao* 受其可汗之號, which could simply mean "accepted titles from their (i.e., the Türks') qaghan." As no source links these men clearly to the title of *qaghan*, it seems best to use caution here. Biographies of these men may be found in *JTS*, 55.2245–47 (Xue Ju), 54.2234–42 (Dou Jiande), 54.2227–34 (Wang Shichong), 55.2248–52 (Li Gui), and 55.2256–57 (Gao Kaidao), as well as in *XTS*, 86.3705–7 (Xue Ju), 85.3696–703 (Dou Jiande), 85.3689–96 (Wang Shichong), 86.3708–11 (Li Gui), and 86.3714–15 (Gao Kaidao). Additional biographies of Wang Shichong (also called Wang Chong because of the Tang-era taboo on Li Shimin's personal name) may be found in *Bei shi*,79.2660–64 and *SS*, 85.1894–98.

should be recalled that, while he did not call himself a vassal of the Türks, the Tang founder Li Yuan used submissive language in a letter to Shi-bi Qaghan in order to obtain Türk support and achieve his political goals.[39]

How should we interpret Shi-bi Qaghan's granting of these unusual titles to Chinese rebels? The Old Turkic title *qaghan* was, as has been shown, an exalted one held by very few men. Yet its meaning was more flexible than that of Chinese *huangdi*, which was seen essentially as a singular title that could be held by only one—the Son of Heaven who had received Heaven's mandate to rule—even when rival dynasties, and rival emperors, ruled in China. Within any given state in China, there could be only one *huangdi*, whereas the Türk polity was able to accommodate "subordinate qaghans" along with the supreme qaghan.

Shi-bi Qaghan was willing to grant the title of *qaghan* to two, or perhaps three (if we assume that the original form of the title Guo Zihe was offered was Pingyang Qaghan), different rebel leaders, although only two accepted it. Since the Türks' flexible political structure allowed for the existence of subordinate qaghans along with the supreme qaghan, we could regard Shi-bi's act as an attempt to label these men as subordinate qaghans, highly autonomous but still under his dictation. Yet while Liu Wuzhou and Liang Shidu were willing to style themselves as clients of the Türks, their actions seem clearly aimed at creating Chinese-style dynasties and so suggest that their ultimate goal was to become independent rulers within China, rather than simply clients of the Türks. Indeed, the title of *qaghan* may have been ideal in these cases because of its very flexibility. It could satisfy Shi-bi that these men were his subordinates but still hold the promise of autonomy—something that the more restrictive Chinese term *huangdi* could not. Furthermore, the term *qaghan* would have been readily understood by the Inner Asian (and Chinese) troops with whom these men worked. In this "bargain," both sides, the Türk ruler and the Chinese rebels, sought to use each other to achieve their political aims through an apparently flexible relationship.

It seems likely that Shi-bi Qaghan wished to prolong the political disunity or weakness of North China in an effort to prevent the establishment of a powerful new government there that could interfere with Türk plans or actions. Taspar/Tatpar Qaghan had, after all, greatly enjoyed the situation in which his empire was strong and united while North China was politically divided, and Shi-bi may well have wished to return to the days when filial and obedient "sons" in North

[39] Wen, *Da Tang chuangye qiju zhu*, 1.7; see also Pan, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan*, 169–71.

China would seek to curry Türk favor. Shi-bi also may have wished to anticipate all contingencies by supporting anyone who might conceivably establish a new dynasty ruling over all or part of China; the past had revealed how beneficial good relations with North Chinese rulers could be for the Türks. Finally, there may have been an element of revenge involved in Shi-bi's actions. In 614, jut a few years prior to these events, the Sui emperor had attempted to drive a wedge between Shi-bi Qaghan and his younger brother Chi-ji 叱吉 Shad by offering the latter a marriage alliance and the hybrid title of Nanmian 南面 ("Southern Flank") Qaghan. Chi-ji had refused the offer.[40] It appears that the Sui government was attempting to replicate its earlier success in pitting the rival qaghans Du-lan 都藍 (r. 588–599) and Qi-min against one another in 599.[41] The Sui effort to weaken Shi-bi through this form of *yi yi zhi yi* surely would have angered Shi-bi, Qi-min's successor, and may have prompted his eagerness to assist those who were seeking to destroy the Sui dynasty.

The title "Nanmian Qaghan" was used again a few years later. In 621, the Tang emperor received information that one of his officials, a certain Li Zhongwen 李仲文, was planning a rebellion. According to the report, Li Zhongwen had curried favor with the Eastern Türk ruler Illig Qaghan, who had promised to elevate him as "Nanmian Qaghan." The plot was foiled and Li executed.[42] Although the appointment was never made, it is interesting to see how Illig Qaghan not only planned to continue Shi-bi's policy of aiding rebels against the Chinese throne, but also intended to employ the very title that the Sui dynasty had sought to use just seven years earlier in its attempt to destabilize the Eastern Türk realm. Such a pointed use of this title again suggests the possibility that revenge was a motivating factor in Illig Qaghan's plan. Overall, however, revenge seems to have taken a back seat to both of these qaghans' interest in influencing the developing structure of power in North China.

Ultimately, the Türks could not prevent the reunification of China and the establishment of a strong dynasty there. For this reason, the Türk policy of supporting men such as Liu Wuzhou and Liang Shidu has been disparaged as both unfocused and short-term in nature—a reactive policy reflecting "the structural limitations of the Turkish power elite."[43] While this characterization has much to support it, we must note that much of foreign policy—even creative foreign

[40] *SS*, 67.1582.

[41] *SS*, 84.1872–73; see also *ZZTJ*, 178.5558, 5563–64, and 5568–69.

[42] *ZZTJ*, 188.5904.

[43] Andrew Eisenberg, "Warfare and Political Stability in Medieval North Asian Regimes," *T'oung Pao* 83 (1997): 318–20.

policy—is by nature reactive. This does not mean that the Türk policy was entirely "unimaginative." Indeed, it represents an overt, if unsuccessful, attempt by the Türks to create a favorable political situation in North China that would be to their benefit, or at least not to their harm. Promoting or exploiting divisions within an enemy's ranks could indeed be an extremely effective policy—hence its longevity as part of the *yi yi zhi yi* complex—and is generally not regarded as "unimaginative" if it proves successful. Such a policy was in fact employed by the second Tang emperor, Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649), as part of a strategy that succeeded in bringing the Eastern Türks to their knees with the capture of Illig Qaghan in 630. While it is simplistic to argue that it was only Taizong's masterful manipulation of Türk internal politics that caused the state of the Eastern Türks to unravel and collapse, few would characterize his policies as "unimaginative" or "unfocused." Granted, his goals were different; he wished to neutralize the northern threat, while the Türks apparently sought to maintain a situation in which they could extract wealth from a politically unsettled China. They also would have hoped to keep North China sufficiently weak so that it would not threaten their own political stability.

In the Türks' early history, a divided North China had suited them quite well, whereas a united China (under the Sui dynasty) had presented serious problems for them. It made perfect sense for the Türks to hope to return to the situation of the earliest decades of their state, when it was relatively easy for them to exploit the rivalry between the two Tuo-ba dynasties; China did not have to be unified to be exploited. The Türk policy of the Sui-Tang transition is judged harshly because it did not work. Under the circumstances that confronted him, Shi-bi Qaghan employed titles, symbols, and military force to engage in a creative form of political manipulation—*yi Han zhi Han*—that was intended to prevent the reunification of China (or even North China) or at least ensure that Shi-bi would be on friendly terms with whomever became the new Son of Heaven. Had this policy been successful, or had China not been reunified due to other factors, Shi-bi's actions could be regarded in a different light. There was, after all, no inevitability to the Tang reintegration of China.

The only other known case of a Chinese "qaghan" appointed by the Türks occurred during the period of the restored (or "second") Türk Empire and the Zhou interregnum of Empress Wu in China. The Türks, having seen their state undermined by internal division and ultimately destroyed by Tang Taizong in 630, were able to restore their political fortunes in 682 and once again assert their authority throughout much of Inner Asia. Under its first two rulers, Qutlugh

Ilterish Qaghan[44] (r. 682–691) and his brother Qapghan Qaghan[45] (r. 691–716), the restored empire carried out frequent military campaigns throughout much of Inner Asia and also threatened China. The Tang dynasty was at this time still a strong and stable state, but underwent a dramatic transformation when Empress Wu, widow of the previous emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649–683) and mother of his successors Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 684) and Ruizong 睿宗 (r. 684–690), removed her son from the throne and declared a new dynasty, Zhou, with herself as "Son of Heaven." This is not to assert that the empress's leadership seriously weakened the empire; her career has been closely scrutinized, and the general assessment is that she effectively maintained China's strength. But the assumption of the throne by a woman, something which had never before occurred in Chinese history, signaled an era of uncertainty and raised important questions about the legitimacy of China's new sovereign.

Under Qapghan Qaghan, the Türks soon began raids into North China. When a showdown was imminent, he abruptly made friendly overtures, and the empress appointed him as Generalissimo of the Left Guards (Chinese *Zuowei dajiangjun* 左衛大將軍) as well as Duke Guiguo 歸國 in 695.[46] The empress also sent her official Yan Zhiwei 閻知微[47] to honor Qapghan with the title Qianshan 遷善 Qaghan,[48] with Chinese *qianshan* referring to a person who reforms his ways by embracing goodness. These were, of course, symbolic actions that meant little in real geo-political terms; Qapghan did not command any Zhou guards, and while *guiguo* means "returning to allegiance to the [Zhou] state," Qapghan's "allegiance" was both temporary and tempered by expedience. These honors did gain for Qapghan the empress's gift of 5,000 rolls of silk as well as a cessation of hostilities.

This situation did not last long. The Zhou state was quickly threatened by a series of serious military threats. First, the Tibetans attacked in 695–696, and then the Khitans rebelled against Chinese overlordship in 696. Qapghan offered to assist the empress and was rewarded by her with two new titles: Xie-die-li-shi Da Chan-

[44] Qutlugh Ilterish is known in Chinese sources as Gu-du-lu 骨篤祿 Ke-han—i.e., Qutlugh Qaghan.

[45] Qapghan is known in Chinese sources as Mo Chuo 默啜, which probably renders Old Turkic *Beg Čor*. Chor was a title of great esteem among the Türks; see Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*, 427–28.

[46] *JTS*, 194A.5168.

[47] Brief biographies of Yan Zhiwei may be found in *JTS*, 77.2679–80 and *XTS*, 100.3942.

[48] *XTS*, 215A.6045. According to this source, the sequence of events was somewhat different, and all three titles were given to Qapghan because of his offer to help the empress in her struggle with the Khitans. See also *ZZTJ*, 205.6510.

yu 頡跌利施大單于 and Ligong Baoguo 立功報國 Qaghan. Both are hybrid titles. The first combines Turkic, Chinese, and—unexpectedly—archaic Xiong-nu elements: *Xie-die-li-shi* is Turkic Ilterish,[49] *da* is Chinese (meaning "great"), and *chan-yu* (or *shan-yu*) is the Chinese transcription of the title employed by the supreme ruler of the Xiong-nu centuries before (and hence is analogous to Old Turkic *qaghan*). With the first title, Empress Wu's court demonstrated its own ability to understand and manipulate Inner Asian symbols, including historically potent terms from the distant past. The second title granted to Qapghan is rather prosaic and speaks more to a Chinese audience; it means "the Qaghan who establishes merit to serve [literally, 'repay'] the realm." For the Chinese audience, this would imply Qapghan's subservience to Empress Wu. As before, Yan Zhiwei was deputed to bestow these titles on Qapghan.[50]

Qapghan took advantage of the Khitan rebellion and the crisis it had provoked within China to increase his own wealth and power, and he pressured the empress to return some Türks living within the Tang realm to him, to send him various gifts (including not only typical items such as Chinese silk but also seed grain and agricultural implements), and to grant his daughter an imperial marriage; she finally acceded. Here we see an example of an Inner Asian sovereign adeptly reversing the Chinese concept of marital alliances as part of the *yi yi zhi yi* complex, seeking a marriage that would be a clear mark of Chinese support for his rule and that could place him in an advantageous position in relation to the Chinese throne. In 698, the empress sent Yan Zhiwei—who must have know the way well by this point—to escort her grandnephew Wu Yanxiu 武延秀 to Qapghan's court. Yan was chosen because of his support of this particular policy, which was quite controversial at court, and the friendly relations he had established with Qapghan Qaghan. But while the Türk monarch had requested a Chinese prince for his daughter to marry, he rejected the empress's grandnephew since he was not of the legitimate Tang imperial house—the deposed Li family. Qapghan went further than this, however. He gave Yan Zhiwei the title of Nanmian Qaghan and stated that he wished to cause Yan to be "lord over the people of Tang." The hybridity of this title suggests that it was meant to have an impact on Chinese people, who would have understood its meaning far better than most Türks.[51] Qapghan then involved Yan in raids into Hebei. The enraged empress, herself highly adept at symbolic action, had "Mo Chuo" 默啜, the Chinese rendition of the name used

[49] See Cen Zhongmian 岑仲勉, *Tu-jue jishi* 突厥集史, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 2:1125. Ilterish is a title associated in the eighth-century Old Turkic inscriptions with the restored empire's first ruler, Qutlugh, rather than with Qapghan.

[50] *XTS*, 215A.6045.

[51] This is explicit in Yan's biography in *XTS* (see 100.3942).

for Qapghan, changed to "Zhan Chuo" 斬啜 (beheaded *chor*)—yet another title (this time from the Chinese side) suggesting both an order and a prophecy. Qapghan's forces ultimately were repulsed by the empress's "heavenly troops" after heavy losses. Yan was later allowed to return to China, where the empress arranged a gruesome death for him. According to one source, the empress's officials were ordered to shoot arrows at him, and so many stuck in his body that they resembled the spines of a hedgehog. The flesh was then cut from his bones, and the bones hacked to pieces. To extend his punishment, the empress also put to death many of his relatives.[52] The ferocity of her response suggests that she did not see Yan as a mere stooge of the Türks, but as a vile traitor whose actions, including use of the title "Nanmian Qaghan"—whether reluctant or not—were a threat to her own legitimacy.

There appears to be no reason to believe that Qapghan actually thought that Yan Zhiwei would become "lord over the people of Tang," but the Türk ruler's act was not an empty gesture. His intention must have been to embarrass the empress and possibly destabilize her government, not only by sending troops against her, but especially by making blatant reference to the illegitimacy of her rule. He is reported to have said, "I am a qaghan and my daughter should marry the son of the Son of Heaven. The Wu clan is insignificant."[53] Furthermore, it seems clear that the appointment of Yan Zhiwei as a qaghan differed from Shi-bi's earlier appointments of Liu Wuzhou and Liang Shidu in another important way. The latter two were potential sovereigns of China (or at least part of China), but the component of *nanmian* in Yan's title suggests that despite Qapghan's remark about Yan becoming lord over the people of Tang, he was actually seen as acting only in the capacity of a sort of "subordinate qaghan" within the Türk power structure rather than as a future Son of Heaven. Be that as it may, we can see here once again the skilful manipulation of symbols by a Türk ruler. First, as we have noted above, the title "Nanmian Qaghan" had been used before—offered by the Sui government to a Türk Qaghan's brother in 614 in an unsuccessful effort to sow dissent within the Türk leadership, and again by the Türk ruler Illig Qaghan in 621 in another unsuccessful effort, this time to destabilize the new Tang regime. The title thus had some historical weight, having been used in a hostile manner

[52] For these events see *ZZTJ*, 206.6530–31, 6533, and 6537 as well as *JTS*, 194A.5168–69. Ouyang Xiu asserts that Yan escaped from the Türks, as opposed to being sent back; see *XTS*, 100.3942. For an examination of these complex events in English, see R. W. L. Guisso, *Wu Tse-t'ien and the Politics of Legitimation in T'ang China* (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 1978), 136–46 as well as Pan, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan*, 265–69. Guisso, however, does not discuss Yan Zhiwei.

[53] *ZZTJ*, 206.6531.

by both Chinese and Türk rulers to promote division within the other's realm. We cannot be certain that Qapghan knew of these precedents, but it is certainly possible (and likely) that he did. Second, Qapghan surely knew that Empress Wu's usurpation of the throne and declaration of her Zhou dynasty were regarded by many Chinese as illegitimate. He took advantage of this, and his raids into China, in which Yan Zhiwei took part, may have been intended not only to weaken his enemy but also to provoke or rally those in China who opposed the empress. In any event, his actions were largely responsible for her formal announcement that the Li family would resume the throne after her death, as it was only after the announcement that the empress was able to raise an army large enough to end the Türk threat.[54] Qapghan was highly sensitive to issues of legitimacy; while some Chinese records refer to his accession as an act of usurpation,[55] the Old Turkic inscriptions are quite careful to state that his elevation was in accordance with Türk customary law.[56]

These rare but significant examples of Türk leaders giving Turkic or hybrid Sino-Turkic titles to Chinese elites provide insights into the politics and culture of the region. Like their Chinese counterparts, Türk monarchs proved adept at manipulating both symbols and people to further their own interests, and their cultural competency in this regard was broad. Much of this has to do with the nature of the North China/Inner Asian frontier zone, which had become increasingly complex in ethnic and cultural terms since the late third century with the creation of a "mixed culture" in North China that "faded into the cultures of the steppe peoples."[57] The Türk polity, like its political rivals in North China, was an ethnically complex organization of peoples linked to a range of cultural and ethnic identities; regular contact at the frontier only enhanced this complexity through various forms of interaction and exchange. The development of this complex and diverse frontier region, dominated by culturally fluid elites, is one of the most significant aspects of the history of the region,[58] and we cannot comprehend Türk-

[54] See Guisso, *Wu Tse-t'ien and the Politics of Legitimation in T'ang China*, 145–46. Guisso asserts (126–27) that Empress Wu planned (most of the time, at least) to return the throne to the Tang dynasty; thus, while Qapghan's invasion forced her to make a formal announcement declaring Zhongzong her heir-apparent, this was not out of line with her intentions.

[55] See, for example, *JTS*, 194A.5168 and *XTS*, 215A.6045.

[56] See Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, 234 and 266.

[57] Arthur F. Wright, "The Sui Dynasty," in Denis Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3: *Sui and T'ang China, 589–906*, part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 54.

[58] For an overview, see Charles Holcombe, *The Genesis of East Asia, 221 B.C.–A.D. 907* (Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 116–44. Holcombe's analysis

Chinese relations without understanding this important phenomenon.

In a recent article, Jonathan Skaff pointed to cases related to those considered here from the Sui-Tang transition era as examples of the complexity of identities and loyalties in the frontier zone at this time. As he noted, many Chinese aspirants to the throne were willing to accept the patronage of non-Chinese rulers as a pragmatic policy to advance their goals[59]—an interpretation supported by this essay. This points to an aspect of Chinese-Inner Asian frontier history that is becoming increasingly significant in current research: "The frontier truly appears to have been a permeable zone of ecological transition that permitted people to move in both directions along the borderlands in terms of both their physical locations and their political allegiances."[60] The permeable nature of the region was reinforced not only by shifting allegiances that seem to cross cultural boundaries (which clearly were not so firm as some might think) but also by the Turkic and Sino-Turkic titles employed by important claimants to the Chinese throne. The most significant of these, Liu Wuzhou and Liang Shidu, both appear to have signaled their recognition of the Türk rulers' superior position not only by their use of these hybrid titles, but also by their acceptance of standards topped with metal wolf's-heads. As has been noted, such standards were of great importance, serving as symbols of the ruling A-shi-na clan's power and legitimacy; they were used in the qaghan's camp and apparently throughout the Türk state as symbols of royal authority, and were just one element of the wolf symbolism that was prevalent within the First Türk Empire.[61] Many who saw such a standard at the headquarters of either Liu Wuzhou or Liang Shidu would have immediately realized their connection to the Türk monarch and known that such a token signaled Liu's and Liang's reliance upon Türk patronage.

In regard to the titles themselves, the use of the term *qaghan* should not necessarily suggest that Liu Wuzhou or Liang Shidu (let alone Yan Zhiwei) were being granted parity with the Türk rulers. As I have noted, the title *qaghan* could be employed to describe either an independent ruler or a "subordinate qaghan" under the dictation of the supreme qaghan. Given the fact that both men were given wolf's-head standards as well as titles, it seems that they were to be regarded as "subordinate qaghans," and not independent rulers—although they could be

reveals not only ethnic and cultural "mixing," but also ethnic and cultural tensions that accompanied this process.

[59] See Skaff, "Survival in the Frontier Zone," 125–35. Skaff pays special attention to the cases of Liang Shidu as well as two other hopefuls: Gao Kaidao and Yuan Junzhang 苑君璋.

[60] Skaff, "Survival in the Frontier Zone," 133.

[61] *ZS*, 50.909–10; *SS*, 84.1863.

seen as having the capacity to become independent rulers. The title of *qaghan* carried weight and authority with it that was not given away lightly, and yet it offered an important element of flexibility. In the years of the Sui-Tang transition, the Türks did not grant such a lofty title to any Sui official who submitted to them. For example, Zhang Changsun 張長遜 sought protection from the Türks during this time of chaos, but he was never a contender for the Chinese throne; the Türks gave him the title of Ge-li 割利 Tigin (Chinese *te-qin* 特勤).[62] While a sign of status, this title (*tigin*)was widely used within the Türk state as a general mark of distinction for males of the ruling family, particularly the younger brothers and sons of the ruling qaghan. It therefore usually carried significantly less authority than the titles containing the element *qaghan* granted to Liu Wuzhou and Liang Shidu.

These historical instances of Chinese men being granted the title of qaghan by the Türks occurred at times of political uncertainty within China coupled with great Türk power in Inner Asia. The first happened at a time of chaos and dynastic transition in China, with the Mandate of Heaven up for grabs. The Türks hoped to use this to their advantage by supporting a number of claimants to the Chinese throne. They may have been hedging their bets (supporting all candidates) or following a policy aimed at promoting disunity within China—or both.[63] Indeed, for the Türks at this time a divided China (or North China) was more typical than a united one. When the first Türk state was formed in the middle of the sixth century, a united China was a distant memory, and political fragmentation was the norm. Despite the brief Sui success at reunification, there was no certainty at all that the Sui collapse would lead to another unified Chinese state. The Türks worked effectively within that ambiguity, attempting to promote their interests no matter what the outcome. They would have remembered that they had been strong when China was divided, and that China's unification under the Sui dynasty had created a situation in which the Chinese could exploit Turk divisions. So it seems likely that the Turks would be eager to prevent a strong, united China (or even North China) that could create serious political challenges to them. The destruction of their power just about a decade later by the vigorous Tang dynasty shows the wisdom, if inefficacy, of their efforts.

As for the second case involving Yan Zhiwei, this occurred during the highly unusual circumstances of the Zhou interregnum, which caused consternation

[62] *SS*, 57.2301. Chinese Ge-li could render Old Turkic *qarï*, "old" (used here in the polite sense of "advanced in years"); see Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*, 644.

[63] See Eisenberg, "Warfare and Political Stability in Medieval North Asian Regimes," 318–20. He argues that the Türk policy should be seen as one of "divide and rule."

within China itself because of its flouting of political and social norms. Qapghan was in the process of reasserting Türk strength. His policy toward his political rival, Empress Wu, proved effective for this purpose. Yan was a pawn with no hope of becoming emperor, but his appointment as Nanmian Qaghan made him a high-profile character in the political theater that Qapghan promoted, in conjunction with real military might, to assert his own authority and weaken that of Empress Wu.

The "early medieval" era of East Asian history was a time of significant cultural interaction leading to the formation of complex ethnic and cultural identities, particularly in regard to North China and Inner Asia. The elites of that region have frequently been described as being of ethnically mixed ancestry, resulting from shifting frontiers and the large-scale movement of Inner Asian peoples into North China after the fall of the Han dynasty. The rulers of both the Sui and Tang dynasties came from this ethnically and culturally mixed aristocracy. As a result of such widespread interactions among peoples, the Sui and Tang periods, particularly before the An Lushan rebellion of the mid-eighth century, are seen as highly cosmopolitan eras.[64] This concept of cosmopolitanism must be applied to the Türk empires as well.

A study of Chinese "qaghans" offers evidence of the validity for regarding the North China-Inner Asia frontier region as a "hybridized" zone of blended cultures in which personal loyalties and even identities were far from rigid. This is not to imply that most persons in this region did not identify themselves as Türk or Chinese (or Khitan, etc.), but to suggest that for such persons it was a normal state of affairs for different ethno-linguistic groups to interact with each other in a number of ways, particularly when it came to political matters. The famed cosmopolitanism that is touted as a characteristic of the early Tang dynasty was not only found within the Chinese state, but well beyond it. The Türks, too, embraced a broad worldview in which they could intervene in Chinese political affairs through the effective manipulation of both Chinese and Türk political symbolism as well as the use of raw military power. Not only do these examples of *yi Han zhi Han* reveal that the Türks were adept at turning the tables on the Chinese by adapting their own policies; the "hybrid" and Turkic titles granted to Chinese by the Türks can themselves serve as symbols of the cultural and political complexity of the North China/Inner Asian frontier.

[64] On this important subject, see Charles Holcombe, "Immigrants and Strangers: From Cosmopolitanism to Confucian Universalism in Tang China," *T'ang Studies* 20–21 (2002–2003): 71–112. Another important study related to this subject is Marc S. Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

CONTEMPLATING RULERSHIP: THE *CHANGDUAN JING* AND TANG POLITICAL THOUGHT

Anthony DeBlasi
The University at Albany, State University of New York

A rather remarkable phenomenon has swept the publishing industry in the People's Republic of China during the last decade. No fewer than thirty-two editions of a relatively obscure text titled the *Changduan jing* 長短經 by a little-known author, Zhao Rui 趙蕤 (fl. 716), have been published.[1] Although one of the more effusive publishers claims on the cover of its edition that the *Changduan jing* was paired with the venerable *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 as essential reading for successful politicians, military strategists, and businessmen throughout Chinese history,[2] it is safe to say that this Tang period text has received only sporadic attention in scholarly circles. This attention has been almost entirely confined to Chinese language scholarship. Beyond the short chapter that Wang Yunwu devoted to the text in his history of political thought during the Jin and Tang periods, a relatively small number of articles have appeared in academic journals.[3] Yet, there are good reasons for giving the *Changduan jing* some attention. First, the text serves as a veritable compendium of Chinese political thought prior to the early eighth century. Since the text was produced as the Tang dynasty approached its zenith, we can use it as a window into some of the key theoretical issues at that critical moment. It also enables us to infer something about the relationship between political thought and the historical experience of the Tang. Second, the *Changduan jing*, by its particular nature, reveals much about how Tang intellectuals approached the long Chinese textual tradition, especially in the areas of political theory, moral philosophy, and history. Finally, the text invites the modern reader to

The author would like to thank the journal's editor and Michael Fuller for their helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this essay.

[1] Zhou Bin 周斌, Changduan jing *jiaozheng yu yanjiu* 長短經校證與研究 (hereafter Zhou *CDJ*) (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 2003), 732–34.

[2] Zhao Rui, *Fanjing* 反經, ed. Li Guyin 李古寅 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2002).

[3] Wang Yunwu 王雲五, *Jin Tang zhengzhi sixiang* 晉唐政治思想 (Taibei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1969), 151–68. Although this mostly is a selection of quotations from the text with summary comments, Wang's sense of the important topics is helpful in thinking about the text. I will refer to some of the journal literature below.