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

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Abstract

This article is an investigation into the founding of the Khitan empire based on a diverse collection of historical documents from both the Northern and Central Plains regions.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

Keywords

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

Regarding the issue of the founding year of the Khitan empire, the many historical records are not at all in agreement. The *Liaoshi* 遼史 asserts that the Taizu 太祖 Emperor, Yelü Abaoji 耶律阿保機 (r. 916–926), proclaimed the founding of the dynasty in 907 and from 916 declared the beginning of his dynasty in the year of Shence 神册 (916–922). Yet today's scholarship on the history of the Liao dynasty generally believes that in 907, Yelü Abaoji merely assumed leadership as the new Khan of the Yaonian 遙輦 clan to become leader of the unified Khitan tribes and only in 916 declared himself the emperor of a new Khitan empire. There is a small group of scholars, basing their views on the *Liaoshi*, who advocates that 907 should be considered the founding year of the Liao dynasty.¹ Moreover, in the 1930s Japanese scholars, based on records from the Five Dynasties (907–960) and the Song dynasty (960–1279), articulated the argument that the Khitan empire was not founded until the first year of the Tianzan 天贊 (922–926) in 922.² Some scholars even go so far as to state that Yelü Abaoji never actually assumed the title of emperor, and it was only Liao Taizong 遼太宗 (r. 923–947) who finally adopted the mantle of Chinese-style emperors.³

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 *Liaoshi*, 44.568.

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

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

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

As everyone knows, Yelü Yan's *Huangchao shilu* survived until the end of the Yuan dynasty and became an importance source for the *Liaoshi*. What is less well known is that, after the fall of the Liao dynasty, *Huangchao shilu* was still included among the historical records of the Liao even up to the Southern Song (1127–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) periods. The *Suichutang shumu* 遂初堂書目 includes *Qidan shilu* 契丹實錄 as a book in the category of geography⁸ while the *Songshi* 宋史 includes it as a biography volume but does not give the author's name. *Shishantang cangshu mulu* 世善堂藏書目錄 by Ming dynasty books collector Chen Di 陳第 (1541–1617) records two types of Liao dynastic history. One is *Liao xianchao shiji chao* 遼先朝事蹟抄 in four volumes by Xiao Hanjianu 蕭韓家奴 (975–1046). The other is *Liao shilu chao* 遼實錄抄 in four volumes by Yelü Yan.⁹ Evidently, the former is a transcript of the *Shilu* compiled by Xiao Hanjianu and others in the thirteenth year of the Zhongxi era. Furthermore, the latter work is a transcript of Yelü Yan's *Huangchao shilu*. *Shishantang cangshu mulu* was compiled in the forty-fourth year of the Wanli

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 See *Ibid.*, 260.8475.

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

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

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

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

16 *Zizhi tongjian*, 269.8809.

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

18 *Zizhi tongjian*, 269.8809.

19 *Ibid.*, 253.8197.

20 See *Ibid.*, 272.8881.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

31 See *Zizhi tongjian*, 269.8809.

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

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

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

33 See *Zizhi tongjian*, 269.8808–9.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

46 See the aforementioned Yang Zhijiu, "Abaoji jiwei kaobian".

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

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

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

5 Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translated by Jon Formella

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

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