A RESPONSE TO DIETER KUHN,
“LIAO ARCHITECTURE: QIDAN INNOVATIONS AND HAN-CHINESE TRADITIONS?”
(T’oung Pao LXXXVI [2000], 4-5, pp. 325-362)

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The extraordinary length (38 pages) and appearance as a featured article of Dieter Kuhn’s review of my Liao Architecture (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997) are highly unusual. I welcome direct communication with readers concerning issues I do not address below, but might have dealt with in a longer response.

In his introduction, Kuhn offers a clear, accurate, and succinct discussion of the major themes and purposes I had in writing Liao Architecture. He makes excellent choices of quotes from the book which articulate those themes and goals. Nonetheless, a number of fundamental disagreements between us remain.

For example, the title of the first subsection of Kuhn’s discussion of my examination of aboveground architecture contains the phrase, “Architects of the Liao Dynasty” (p. 330). This is curious since the word architect does not appear in my book. Neither the profession of architect nor schools for training them existed in China before the 20th century. Rather, there were builders, court officials who served in various capacities in imperial construction enterprises, patrons and, no doubt, geomancers. Some scholars are heartened by the occasional appearance in primary sources of names such as Yuwen Kai, Yu Hao, Guo Shoujing, and Li Jie. Even though these are not architects in the modern sense of the word, we can associate their names with specific building and engineering projects or seminal literary works. Yet so far, no equivalent names are known for the Liao period. Information about builders and patronage of Liao buildings is drawn mainly from temple stele, local records, and the existing secondary literature on Liao structures. Kuhn (p. 332) notes several of the patrons which I discuss: Li Yanchao at Geyuansi; Jiao
Xiyun, at Fengguosi; Wang Wenxi, at Guangjis; and he could have added Han Kuangsi at Dulesi (pp. 34-35); and monks associated with Fogongsi and Guangjis.

Kuhn is correct (p. 332) in deducing from my discussion that Han-Chinese in Liao service were involved in major construction projects. He then asks why I did not continue to stress more strongly the influence of Chinese life and culture on the Qidan, especially in the Southern Regions of the empire (p. 333). The answer is simple: The subject remains speculative. He queries why I did not use information about Prince Bei, son of Abaoji and brother of the emperor Deguang, to strengthen the case of “steadily growing influence of Chinese life and culture on the Qidan.” The man sometimes referred to as Yelu Bei (Kuhn’s “Prince Bei”), also identified as the painter Li Zanhua, is mentioned four times in my book (p. 8, 15, 256, and 375). His biography in Liaoshi (juan 72, p. 1211) informs the reader that he was skilled at painting figures of his native land and lists three paintings by him. However, not one reliable painting attribution has ever been confirmed. Thus it is impossible to even speculate on Li’s ability to paint in Chinese style. More important, this potential paragon of Chinese taste may at one time have been Abaoji’s designated successor, but the reality of his life was that already by 923 when he fled south from Dongdan to Chinese territory it was clear that he would never succeed his father; and in his 38th year, mid-way through the reign of Deguang, Bei was murdered. As for Deguang, about whom Kuhn writes: “In 946, he conquered Kaifeng... When entering Kaifeng the political and cultural significance of metropolitan Chinese architecture must have dawned on him” (p. 333), maybe it was so—perhaps he was able to orchestrate the implementation of a vision of Chinese-style imperial architecture at the third Liao capital, Nanjing, during the last year of his life. But what the texts tell us is only that Deguang died on his return home from Kaifeng (and we have no record that his last words concerned future construction projects), that booty looted from Kaifeng, which included things Chinese, was taken to Shangjing (i.e. the Qidan Northern Capital), rather than Nanjing, the Southern Capital, and, if we believe the Southern Song writer Wen Weijian’s Luting shishi (reference to which is on pp. 10, 242, 318, and 320), that Deguang’s burial garments followed Qidan custom.

The second piece of evidence Kuhn believes I should have used to support the argument in favour of sinification is clothing. Donning the robes of Chinese imperialism is, to be sure, symbolic dis-