**XIE JIN (1369-1415) AS IMPERIAL PROPAGANDIST: HIS ROLE IN THE REVISIONS OF THE MING TAIZU SHILU**

BY

HOK-LAM CHAN 陳學霖
University of Washington, Seattle

**Introduction**

The turbulent history of the *Ming Taizu shilu*—the Veritable Records of the founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r. 1368-98)—is well known. As the most authoritative annalistic chronicle of the dynastic founder’s reign, the *Taizu shilu* was compiled by a special commission from the Office of Historiography (shiyuan 史院) placed under the Hanlin Academy, on the order of his immediate successors and in conformity with the Chinese historiographical tradition. Zhu Yuanzhang, who inaugurated the Hongwu 洪武

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(August Military) reign in January 1368 and was known by his temple-name Taizu (Grand Progenitor), was succeeded upon his death in June 1398 by his grandson and chosen heir, Zhu Yunwen 朱允炆 (r. 1399-1402), known as the Jianwen 建文 (Established Culture) emperor. In February 1399, eight months after his accession, Zhu Yunwen ordered the compilation of his grandfather’s Shilu. Completed in January 1402, this first version underwent two revisions in 1402 and 1411 on the orders of Zhu Di 朱棣 (r. 1403-24), who had succeeded Zhu Yunwen by usurpation. Zhu Di established the Yongle 永樂 (Everlasting Happiness) reign and was known by two temple-names, first Taizong 太宗 (Grand Ancestor) and later Chengzu 成祖 (Accomplished Progenitor). The latter was conferred on him in October 1538 by Shizong 世宗, the Jiajing 嘉靖 emperor (r. 1522-67).

Born in May 1360, Zhu Di, Taizu’s fourth son, was ten years old when he was enfeoffed as the Prince of Yan 燕, with his seat at Beiping 北平 Prefecture (modern Beijing), in May 1370. He did not take up residence at his fief until April 1380, at the age of twenty, and became the most powerful prince of the fiefdoms created by Ming Taizu to safeguard the empire. The Prince was distraught by his nephew’s accession and usurped the throne after a three-year civil war called jingnan 靖難 (clearing out the disorders), inaugurating a new reign in July 1402. The Jianwen emperor allegedly perished in a fire set in the imperial palace when the capital, Nanjing, fell—unless, as popular legends have it, he escaped in the disguise of a monk and lived out his natural years. The new emperor Yongle changed the name of his own fief to Beijing 北京 (Northern Capital), elevating it to capital status, and ordered extensive construction. In January 1421, Beijing became the primary capital of the empire upon completion of the new imperial city, reducing Nanjing to the status of secondary capital in an unfolding “dual capital system.”