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Routledge Handbook of Imperial Chinese History

Edited by Victor Cunrui Xiong and
Kenneth J. Hammond

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF IMPERIAL CHINESE HISTORY

*Edited by Victor Cunrui Xiong and
Kenneth J. Hammond*

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2019
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Xiong, Victor Cunrui, editor. | Hammond, Kenneth James, editor.
Title: Routledge Handbook of Imperial Chinese History / edited by Victor Cunrui Xiong and Kenneth J. Hammond. Other titles: Imperial Chinese History

Description: London; New York: Routledge, 2019. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018016531 | ISBN 9781138847286 (hardback) |
ISBN 9781315726878 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: China—Civilization—221 B.C.-960 A.D. |
China—Civilization—960-1644.

Classification: LCC DS749.3 .R68 2019 | DDC 951—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018016531>

ISBN: 978-1-138-84728-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-72687-8 (ebk)

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by codeMantra

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THE KITAN-LIAO AND JURCHEN-JIN

Valerie Hansen

Introduction

After the Tang dynasty collapsed in 907, some fifty years of disunity followed until the Song dynasty reunified China in 960. Many historians of China skip from the Tang dynasty to the Song dynasty, and so pay no attention to either the Liao dynasty of the Kitan peoples (ca. 907–1125) or the Jin dynasty of the Jurchens (1115–234). These two non-Chinese dynasties, however, developed a successful blueprint that allowed them, both tiny minorities greatly outnumbered by their Chinese subjects, to govern successfully. Their innovations paved the way both for Mongol rule of China—first in the north, from 1234 to 1276, and then over the entire empire from 1276 to 1368—and for Manchu rule over the entire empire, from 1644 to 1911.

This article uses the word *Liao* to refer to the dynasty and to the country and the culture of the various peoples—Kitan, Chinese, and other—governed by the Liao. The term *Kitan* refers more specifically to the Kitan people, and the Liao to the imperial family. Similarly, *Jin* refers to the dynasty and to the country and the culture of the peoples—Jurchen, Chinese, and other—governed by the Jin dynasty; the term *Jurchen* refers to the Jurchen people and the Jin ruling house.

The Kitans were a nomadic group who spoke a language related to Mongolian and tended herds as their basic way of life. The founder of the Liao dynasty, a leader named Abaoji 阿保幾 (872–926), saw himself as the legitimate successor to the Tang. He dated the start of the dynasty to 907, the final year of the Tang, even though his grip on power was not yet fully secure. The Kitan homeland straddled the modern provinces of Inner Mongolia and Liaoning. Due to their powerful cavalry, the Kitans conquered much territory. At its largest extent, the Liao controlled the modern cities of Beijing and Datong in Shanxi province, as well as the provinces of Inner Mongolia, Liaoning, and Jilin, sections of southeastern Russia, and a stretch of grasslands across much of Mongolia.

The Kitan rulers created a government with two branches, one for its Kitan subjects, and the other for its Chinese subjects. This innovation of dual administration was particularly important because it served as a model for the Mongols, whose founders recruited many Kitans to serve as their advisors just before they conquered North China.

The Liao dynasty established by Abaoji lasted until 1125, when it was succeeded by the Jin dynasty. The founder of the Jin, Aguda 阿骨打 (1068–1123), formed a powerful confederation of different tribes in Manchuria, which was under Liao rule at the time. After overthrowing their Kitan overlords, the Jurchens conquered North China in 1126, and forced the Song dynasty to retreat south of the Yangzi River. For this reason, after 1127, the Song dynasty came to be known as the Southern Song (1127–1276).

The Jurchens embraced Chinese language and customs so enthusiastically that almost no Jurchen-language records survive. The Jin dynasty recruited officials via separate exams in the Jurchen and Chinese languages. When the Jin dynasty surrendered to the Mongol conquerors in 1234, the Mongols adopted many practices from the Jin, including holding separate examinations. The Jurchen legacy was especially important for the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), because the Manchus were descendants of the Jurchens.

For reasons of both nationalism and linguistic competence (they read Chinese sources more easily than those in other languages), Chinese historians have generally neglected the history of non-Chinese dynasties, particularly those like the Liao and the Jin, who ruled over only a section of the eighteen provinces of central China and never succeeded in reunifying the entire empire.

Interestingly, when historians of the time debated which dynasties were legitimate and which were not, some found the Liao claim to succeed the Tang persuasive. And in the early 1200s, one group of historians even argued that the Jin dynasty—and not the Southern Song—was the legitimate successor to the Song dynasty, showing that many Chinese literati believed that a non-Chinese ruler could rightfully rule the empire.

In recent decades, historians have used new sources to gain a much greater understanding of the Liao and Jin dynasties. A small group of dedicated researchers has been working to decipher the two Kitan scripts, and they now can make sense of Kitan-language epitaphs or biographies of the deceased on tombs. Historians of the Liao have also begun to consult Japanese-, Turkic-, Persian- and Arabic-language sources that provide information not available in Chinese or Kitan sources. In addition, a series of spectacular archeological finds has challenged earlier prejudices about the backward Kitans; Kitan tombs contain exquisite gold and silver objects that are just as beautiful as anything made by Tang or Song craftsmen.

In contrast to the Kitan sources, hardly any materials survive in the Jurchen language from the time of the Jin dynasty. Nor have archeological finds prompted the same type of reassessment as for the Liao dynasty. The most important new materials for Jin history are inscriptions in Chinese carved on stone tablets throughout northern China. Some of these texts have been published partially or in full; others have survived and can be seen even today on stone tablets, and intrepid historians have visited remote areas to photograph and transcribe them. These inscriptions vividly capture life in North China under Jurchen rule.

Although widely used, the term Sinicization poses many problems for those working in this field. For one, it assumes that Chinese and non-Chinese cultures constitute two fixed, unchanging entities. The term implies that all change went in only one direction: as the non-Chinese—whether Kitan or Jurchen—adopted Chinese ways. But the opposite certainly occurred: some Chinese learned to read and write Kitan or took Jurchen spouses. The term Sinicization also implies that someone who had become more Chinese could not return to his or her native identity. This, too, is not accurate. As we will learn, some emperors of the Jin dynasty implemented measures to revive the Jurchen language and Jurchen cultural identity. A final flaw with the term: Sinicization does not specify which specific cultural practice a given person or group adopted. Where one non-Chinese person might learn to speak Chinese, another might eat Chinese food, and a third might choose Chinese-style

burial. For these reasons, this essay will not use the term Sinicization or the related terms Kitanification or Jurchenification. Instead, it will provide specific examples of cultural adaptation and explain why the individuals in question made the changes they did.

The Kitans before 907 and the formation of a confederation by Abaoji

The Kitans practiced pastoral steppe nomadism. The Chinese pronounced the tribal name as Qidan, which scholars have reconstructed as Kitan (also spelled Khitan). Little is known about the origins of the Kitans, but they claimed descent from the Xianbei, who had ruled China in the fourth and fifth centuries as the Northern Wei. Initially, the Kitans had no permanent settlements; they lived in tents and moved from site to site with their herds of horses, sheep, and camels.

The Kitan men's distinctive hairstyle set them apart from the Chinese. The men shaved the tops of their heads, leaving a fringe going along the hairline from one ear to the other. They allowed the hair in front of the ears to grow into braids. When they conquered another group, they usually required them to change the way they wore their hair as a sign of submission.

One dynamic leader, known by his Chinese name, Abaoji, unified a loose grouping of Kitan tribes in the years immediately after the collapse of the Tang. Later histories claim that he first unified the Kitans in 907, the last year of the Tang dynasty, and Abaoji was fully aware of the significance of the timing. While he may indeed have been named leader in that year, he was only able to consolidate his power nine years later in 916.

The Kitans determined their leader by selecting the aspirant who prevailed over the others, in a method of selection called *tanistry* or, in Joseph Fletcher's words, rule by "the best qualified member of the chiefly house." When a leader died, those hoping to succeed him fought with each other in a free-for-all; when the victor emerged, the tribesmen gathered to acclaim the new leader, whom they believed the gods had guided to victory. Most nomadic tribes held that only certain families were qualified to rule, and they chose their leaders from the sons of these families. Unusually, Abaoji was not a member of the Kitan ruling clan, but he proved an especially effective leader.

The Liao dynasty

Unlike other tribal peoples who selected a new leader only on the death of the previous one, the Kitans gathered every three years at a *khuriltai* meeting either to choose a new leader or to reaffirm the current one. This method of selection differed from the Chinese tradition of a dynastic ruler who did not have to secure the approval of those under him. Abaoji was sufficiently powerful that he skipped the usual selection process in 910 and in 913, each time antagonizing his brothers, who organized unsuccessful rebellions against him. In 916, rather than risk another uprising, he organized a formal ceremony in which he assumed the throne and gave himself a reign title, in the Chinese tradition, and so claimed to inherit the mantle of the Tang. He also abolished the triannual *khuriltai* meeting.

Abaoji's innovations

Abaoji and his descendants merged Chinese and Kitan traditions when he restructured the Kitan government. They replaced tribal rule with a new type of government called dual administration: the north-facing section of the government governed the Kitans, while the

south-facing half served their Chinese subjects. Initially, officials were appointed to the northern government on the basis of family ties, while those in the southern government had to pass civil service examinations conducted in the Chinese language.

As time went on, the differences between the two governments became more pronounced. By the mid-tenth century, officials of the northern administration wore Kitan clothing and spoke only Kitan, while those in the southern wore Chinese clothing and spoke both Chinese and Kitan. Some of the Liao emperor's most trusted advisors were originally Chinese but learned to speak Kitan and adopted so many Kitan customs that they came to be accepted as Kitan.

The northern administration officials used Kitan titles, while the southern administration borrowed their titles from Chinese dynasties. Twice a year the emperor scheduled meetings with the officials of both the southern and northern administrations, but because the officials of the northern administration always traveled with the emperor, they had year-round access to him. Also, the northern administration controlled the military, making it more powerful than the southern administration.

Although the tribal Kitans had not lived in cities, they began to build them in the tenth century when the Chinese and other peoples flocked to Kitan territory to escape the multiple civil wars occurring in North China. The Kitans constructed cities for their Chinese subjects, built on a grid, complete with walls, gates, and drum and bell towers, but they also left large open spaces for the Kitans to pitch their tents. Because the Kitan ruling family continued to live in tents and to move from city to city, there was no fixed palace. Oxen pulled wagons carrying the royal household's goods each time it moved. There were five different capitals, which the emperor visited at different times of the year.

Inspired by written Chinese characters, Abaoji ordered the introduction of a large script in 920, and a small script in 924. Both scripts contain a mix of elements that are pictorial and phonetic, representing sounds. Scholars have made considerable progress in deciphering epitaphs written in the small script, which has some 400 different elements, but they cannot yet understand the large script, which probably uses a different graph for each word and has a larger number of pictorial elements. Today, only one book in the large script survives, in St. Petersburg, where scholars are currently working on its decipherment. Preliminary analysis suggests that the one-hundred-page-plus manuscript is a chronicle of events compiled by court historians, similar to the veritable records compiled by later dynasties.

Inscriptions in the small script document that the Kitans called their state the Great Kitan between 907 and 938. In 938, when the Later Jinn dynasty (spelled differently to distinguish it from the Jurchen dynasty) ceded the territory around modern Beijing to them, the Kitans began to refer to the Chinese-speaking regions as the Liao (the name of a river running through Kitan territory), but used Great Kitan for the Kitan heartland. In 983, the name Great Kitan indicated both halves of the empire, and then in 1066, under the rule of an emperor who deeply respected the Chinese, the unified empire came to be called the Great Liao. Historians cannot yet account for these changes, which we know about only because of the ongoing decipherment of the small script.

The regency of Empress Chunqin, 926–947

Abaoji was the greatest leader the Kitans had, and his innovations in governance, urban planning, and script all continued after his death in 926. Hundreds of men were killed so that they could be buried in the imperial tomb, and tradition held that his widow should also have died. A Chinese source reports a conversation the Empress Chunqin 淳欽 (878–953),

who took the name Yingtian 應天 at Abaoji's death, had with a high-ranking Chinese official at the time. A powerful leader, she commanded 200,000 troops.

She asked, "You were very close in serving the deceased emperor. Why don't you go?"

The minister replied: "As far as intimacy, no one equaled Your Majesty. If Your Majesty goes, I will follow."

The empress dowager said, "I am not unwilling to follow the deceased emperor underground. But my sons are young and the country has no ruler. I cannot go." She then offered to cut off her arm so that it could be buried with the emperor. When the court officials protested, she then cut off only her hand, which was then placed in Abaoji's coffin.

As successful as Abaoji was, he did not succeed in naming his favorite son as his successor. Both tribal leaders and his widow opposed the designated heir because he was not a powerful enough fighter. The empress Chunqin named a different son to succeed Abaoji, Deguang (r. 926–947). She retained enormous influence over the new emperor, ruling *de facto* as regent.

Empress Chunqin initiated a century of successful Kitan attacks first on the different regional kingdoms of China before the Song founding in 960, and then on the unified Song empire. The Liao controlled a swath of grasslands across Eurasia that was greater in area than the Song realm, but the Song had a much larger population, probably around 100 million versus an estimated 3–4 million living in Liao territory, of whom 1 million were Kitans. Still, the skilled Kitan cavalry often bested the Chinese armies.

In 938, the founder of the Later Jinn dynasty (936–947) overthrew the Later Tang dynasty, with considerable support from the Liao ruler. To express his gratitude, the ruler of the Later Jinn presented the Liao with a seal taken from the Later Tang that was believed to signify the legitimate rule of the Chinese emperor. He also granted the Liao the region of modern Beijing. The Kitan ruler proceeded to name Beijing one of the Kitans' five capitals because the swan hunting in the early spring was good there. This marked the first time in Chinese history that Beijing served as a dynastic capital.

Kitan-Chinese relations, 947–1005

In 947, Empress Chunqin lost power to her grandson. He conquered Kaifeng but withdrew after three months because the Liao had not developed the administrative apparatus to govern such a large territory. In 979, after completing the unification of the empire, the Song emperor attacked the Kitans. The Kitans triumphed once again, and the Song emperor, hit by an arrow, barely escaped with his life. In 982, Dowager Empress Xiao took over the regency when she was 30 (her son the emperor was only 16) and ruled until 1009. She proved to be as powerful a leader as Empress Chunqin. The Song and Kitan forces continued to skirmish regularly, but in 1004, the Kitans launched a successful blitzkrieg invasion of North China, gaining control of much of the Yellow River valley.

The Chinese sued for peace. A former advisor to the Song emperor represented the Kitans in the negotiations. After being taken captive, he had switched sides, as did many high-ranking prisoners of war. The resulting Treaty of Chanyuan (also spelled Shanyuan) 澶淵 stipulated that the Kitans retreat from the conquered territory—but not the region around modern Beijing—in exchange for annual payments of 200,000 bolts of silk (each bolt was 50 cm wide and 12 m long) and 100,000 Chinese ounces (nearly 4 metric tons) of silver. To the Chinese, the payments were less than one or two percent of the cost of waging war, which seemed a reasonable price for peace. The Song was able to earn back everything it paid in war indemnities through trade.

The multistate system of East Asia, 1005–1120

The Treaty of Chanyuan established the Liao as the preeminent military power in East Asia. The treaty also marked the formation of a multistate system, in which the Song state was simply one among several in the region, including the Goryeo dynasty in Korea (918–1392), the Heian rulers of Japan (794–1185), the Xia realm governed by the Tanguts in modern Gansu province (1038–1227), and the various Khanates of the Uighur peoples in modern Gansu and Xinjiang. The Kitans clashed with the rulers of Goryeo Korea three times, in 993, 1010, and 1018. In 1020, the Liao successfully defeated the Goryeo armies, and in 1022 the Goryeo formally acknowledged their inferior role as a tributary of the Liao. While the Song emperor also exchanged envoys with neighboring countries, more East Asian countries maintained diplomatic relations with the Liao than with the Song, which makes perfect sense given that Liao armies had defeated the armies of both the Song and the rulers of Goryeo.

The objects in one Liao-dynasty tomb dating to 1018 testify to the Liao contacts with different rulers all over Eurasia. Originally, the Kitans had not buried their dead. They placed the corpse in a tree for three years, and after the bones had been cleaned of flesh, they burned them. But after the founding of the Liao dynasty, the rulers chose to build Chinese-style tombs for the emperor and all the imperial family. The Princess of Chen 陳 (1001–1018), the granddaughter of Emperor Jingzong 景宗 (r. 969–982), died in 1018, and was buried with her husband. Because robbers never removed anything, the intact tomb is one of the most important Liao-dynasty archeological finds.

As is typical of all Chinese tombs, a sloping stairway led to the central chamber containing the bodies of the princess and her husband. In addition, the tomb had two small chambers on either side, one filled with saddles and horse-tack. The princess and her husband were buried with gold masks, gilded silver filigree crowns, and gilded silver boots. The archeologists who discovered the main chamber were unprepared for the beautiful craftsmanship of the Liao-dynasty objects. Seeing themselves as the rightful successors to the Tang, the Kitan royal house commissioned Chinese craftsmen to produce art that drew heavily on Tang-dynasty prototypes.

Many objects in the tomb came from very distant places, most likely gifts from envoys of neighboring rulers who attended the funeral of the princess. The lead content of the glassware points to its manufacture in either Syria or Egypt. These were probably gifts from neighboring Islamic powers like the Qarakhanids who had conquered the far west of *Xinjiang*. The tomb contained plentiful objects crafted from amber: beads, pendants, animal-shaped containers, hand-held amulets, and a knife handle. Chemical tests show that the amber originated in the Baltic; the amber traveled from lands under Viking control to the Islamic world and from there to the Kitan realm.

The main form of diplomatic relations in East Asia at this time was the exchange of envoys. The ruler of one country would initiate relations with another country by sending an envoy who carried gifts and a letter to its ruler. The envoy could observe the behavior of the ruler and everyone at court in the other country; on his return, he relayed this intelligence to his own ruler. Rulers in such relationships often sent their daughters and other female relatives to marry a male relative of the ruler of an allied country. Sometimes the young men came to live in the court of the bride's father as a hostage.

The Kitan rulers exchanged both envoys and brides with the Qarakhanid rulers to the west. The Qarakhanids, in turn, had exchanged brides with the Ghaznavid rulers in modern Afghanistan. In 1024, the Liao emperor Shengzong (982–1031) sent an envoy carrying a letter to the Ghaznavid court to establish diplomatic relations. No evidence of this overture

survives in either Chinese or Kitan; we know about this only from the writings of the geographer al-Marwazi (1056/57–1124/25) who translated the emperor's letter into Arabic (we do not know the language of the original letter). Shengzong 聖宗 asked that the Afghan ruler send an envoy to him, but the Ghaznavid ruler refused on the grounds that the Kitans did not share his Islamic faith.

In addition to the deities they had worshipped traditionally, the Kitan rulers also patronized Buddhism, building tall pagodas throughout their realm and carving a full set of printing blocks for the Buddhist canon, which contained several thousand texts. Intriguingly, the Kitans never translated Buddhist texts into Kitan; they read them in Chinese. They also maintained contacts with Japanese Buddhists. Both Kitan and Japanese Buddhists carved Buddhist texts on stone and buried treasures in preparation for the coming of a new age, or *kalpa*, in 1052, a date not recognized by Chinese Buddhists.

The Jurchens as a subject people

The peace between the Song and the Kitans, established by the Treaty of Chanyuan, held throughout the eleventh century, but everything changed when a challenger to Kitan rule appeared at the beginning of the twelfth century. Like Abaoji, Aguda used extraordinary leadership ability to unite a large group of different peoples living under Kitan rule in the Liaoning peninsula. Many of his supporters were Jurchen and lived on the eastern edge of the Liao territory. The Jurchens spoke a language related to Kitan and Mongolian but had no alphabet of their own. The first surviving dated example of Jurchen script (and not the Kitan small script, which they used sometimes as a prestige language) dates to 1185.

The Jurchens differed from the Kitans. They were not nomads and did not tend herds. They resided in the forests of Manchuria, where they hunted and fished. In the winter they lived in round, partially subterranean wooden and earthen houses with a central chimney hole. In the summer, they shifted to round tents. All Jurchen men participated in group hunts, and all served as soldiers in wartime. The largest groups in Jurchen society were the clans, which consisted of several lineages, each headed by one man. The basic unit of Jurchen society was the village, a group of Jurchens who farmed together during peace and fought together during war. Over time, the people living in Jurchen villages came to believe that they shared common ancestors and belonged to the same clan, even though they originally came from different places and spoke different languages.

The Chinese called the Jurchens who adopted more Chinese customs “cooked,” and those who had changed less, “uncooked.” During the course of the eleventh century, the Wanyan 完顏 clan, one of the so-called uncooked clans, gained control of the region around the city of Harbin.

The threat to Kitan rule emerged during the First Fish Festival of 1112, an occasion in the early spring, where the Kitan emperor hosted the Jurchen leaders. The drunken Kitan ruler ordered the leader of the Wanyan clan, Aguda, to dance, and Aguda refused. Even more astonishing, when asked again, he refused a second time, an overt challenge to the Kitan ruler. In 1113, Aguda launched the first of many successful rebellions against the Kitans.

The founding of the Jin dynasty and the fall of the Liao dynasty

In 1115, after conquering all of Manchuria, Aguda proclaimed himself the ruler of the Jin (“gold”) dynasty. He named the dynasty after the Ashi River, a tributary of the Sungari, where gold had been found and where his clan had originated. The Song rulers were quick

to recognize Aguda, because they thought they could ally with him, defeat the Kitans, and take back the territory around Beijing that they had never governed. That view proved to be utterly mistaken.

Prior to the conquest of North China, the Jurchen state was basically egalitarian and tribal, as shown by the following description of Jurchen decision-making:

From the commanding general down to the soldiers, everybody... had millet gruel and roast meat for food, and there was no difference in quality high and low. When their country is involved in great affairs [war] they all go out into the wilderness and sit down in a circle, drawing in the ashes. Then they deliberate, starting from the lowest one present. When the council has come to an end, they wash away the charcoal and not a human voice is heard—such is their secrecy.

When the army is about to march, a great reunion with a banquet is held, at which strategic proposals are offered. The generalissimo listens and then selects among those what is appropriate; then immediately a special leader is appointed for its execution.

When the army returns after a victory another great reunion takes place, and it is asked who has won merits. According to the degree of merit, gold is handed out; it is raised and shown to the multitude. If they think the reward too small, it will be increased.¹

This passage shows that ordinary soldiers and the leaders of the most powerful clans of the Jurchens were almost equal. Eating the same rations, they participated in decision-making councils, with their faces smeared with charcoal to hide their identity. When the council divided the plunder among the fighters, it did so on the basis of each man's actual performance in battle, not his social position. This council became the main body of Aguda's new government.

In 1116, Aguda conquered the Kitan heartland of the Liao River. With each victory he recruited the defeated Kitan forces into his army, which was divided into units of three hundred men (*mouke* 謀克), but in fact often numbering fewer. Several of these units formed a larger unit of one thousand (*meng'an* 猛安), the basic building block of Aguda's army. The leaders of the *meng'an* units served as the governors of newly conquered regions.

In 1120, the Chinese and the Jurchens formed an alliance and agreed to attack the Kitans simultaneously; the most important Kitan capital, the Supreme Capital (Shangjing 上京), fell to the Jurchens in that year. After his armies occupied Beijing in 1123, Aguda died in the same year. His younger brother succeeded him, and the war against the Kitans continued. In 1124, the Jurchens captured the Kitan emperor, and the Liao dynasty fell in 1125.

After their defeat, most of the Kitans remained within Jurchen territory, but a small group of nobles moved west to Xinjiang. This group, the Western Liao (1120–1218), was particularly significant because the Mongols encountered them before they conquered either North China, then in the hands of the Jurchens, or Song, South China. They recruited some of their most influential advisors, such as the renowned advisor to Chinggis Khan, Yelü Chucai 耶律楚材 (1190–1244), from among these Kitans. These advisors introduced the Mongols to the Kitan innovation of dual administration.

The Jurchen conquest of the Song, 1126–1141

In 1125, with the collapse of the Liao, the alliance between the Jin and the Song fell apart, and war broke out between them. The Song suffered a decisive defeat, their forces being no match for the Jurchens' powerful cavalry.

In 1126, after conquering north China, the Jurchens issued an order requiring all men in the conquered territories to shave their foreheads, braid their hair down their back, and wear Jurchen-style clothing to display their status as subordinates of the Jurchens. The Jurchens canceled these orders after just a few months because they proved so difficult to enforce.

In 1127, the Jurchens crossed the Yellow River and occupied the Song capital of Kaifeng. In a final attempt to fend off Jin conquest, Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100–25) abdicated in favor of his young son, Qinzong 欽宗 (r. 1126–27), but even so, the Song army proved powerless to hold back the Jurchen forces. After subjugating north China, the Jurchen forces took the two monarchs prisoner and forced them to march north. A novel that was recorded in the 1270s on the basis of earlier storytelling traditions, *Proclaiming Harmony* (Xuanhe yishi 宣和遺事), recounts the sorry end of the two Song emperors. It describes the wide variety of people they encounter as they traverse the north, indicating the many different groups living under Jin-dynasty rule: the Kitans, Han Chinese, Mongols, and Korea-influenced Parhae (Chinese: Bohai 渤海), among others.

At one point, a man dressed in green offers the two former rulers some food and water. He explains: "I was once Chinese. My father Zhou Zhong 周忠 served your majesty's throne during the Yuanfu 元符 era (1098–1100) and was captured. So at that point we were of the Xixia kingdom. During the Xuanhe 宣和 period (1119–1125), Xixia sent me with the troops who went to aid the Kitan tribe. We attacked the Jin, and I was captured and surrendered. Now I am commanding officer at Lingzhou 靈州. I beg your majesty not to reveal my background." As he explained, this man had begun life inside Chinese territory as a Chinese, been captured by the Tanguts, and joined their army. When taken prisoner for the second time by the Jurchens, he joined the Jin forces. His account provides a vivid reminder of the mixed composition of the Jurchen forces and the Kitan armies; they included people of different ethnicities who, like the man in green, could take on and shed ethnic identities as quickly as they could learn to speak a new language.

As *Proclaiming Harmony* recounts, the Jurchens delighted in humiliating the two Song emperors. The former rulers were degraded to commoners in 1127, and the Jurchens gave them new and humiliating titles—the Marquis of Muddled Virtue and Doubly Muddled—showing their mastery of Chinese naming practices for emperors.

Jurchen forces continued to pursue the Song armies south of the Yangzi River for fifteen years, and they took the major cities of the lower Yangzi—Nanjing, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Ningbo—in succession.

Once the Jin had conquered north China, they formed a government to rule the new territory. In 1137, they established the Mobile Presidential Council, which was in charge of all civil and military matters, including the recruitment of new officials. This council created a new unit of regional government, the circuit, which was the forerunner of the modern province.

The Jurchen leaders also made a conscious decision to encourage migration from their Manchurian homeland into north China. The rulers granted new lands to villagers, who then moved *en masse*. The Jurchens who settled in north China gradually adopted different Chinese customs, learning to speak Chinese and eventually intermarrying with the Chinese. Jurchen did not yet have an accessible script. Although the Jurchen ruler had ordered the creation of a large script based on the Kitan large script in 1120 and a Kitan-based small script in 1138, only a few examples of the large script survive from before 1185. If these scripts actually existed—and the small script may not have—they did not receive much use. Instead, most Jurchens used the Kitan small script, which was much more manageable.

In 1141, when the fighting stopped and the two sides finally signed a peace treaty, annual payments were set at 250,000 ounces of silver and 250,000 bolts of silk. The drafters of the

treaty cast aside all the euphemisms maintaining the fiction of Song power. The Song, an “insignificant state,” paid tribute to the Jin, a “superior state.” The treaty explicitly stated the outcome of fifteen years of war: the Song had become the subject state of a non-Chinese dynasty, the Jin.

Jin dynasty rule, 1141–1205

Once peace had been achieved with the Southern Song, the Jurchens faced the challenge of governing a society of more than forty million in which they remained a minority of four million. The emperors of the twelfth century took different approaches: some adopted Chinese-style governance completely, while others tried to strengthen traditional Jurchen customs. The period from 1141 to 1205 marked the high point of Jin-dynasty rule; the Jin controlled north China, and they faced few challenges to their power except for sporadic battles with the Southern Song.

The reign of the Prince of Hailing

One Jurchen ruler, known as the Prince of Hailing 海陵王, seized power in 1150. He loved everything Chinese and even drank Chinese-style tea, prompting some of his subjects to give him the nickname “aping the Chinese.” He embraced the dynastic model from China because it allowed him to consult less with his nobles than did traditional Jurchen governance.

To this end, the Prince of Hailing established a more traditional bureaucracy modeled on the Chinese state, complete with the traditional Six Boards (Revenue, Civil Appointments, Rites, Works, Punishments, and War) and the Secretariat. The most powerful body remained the Presidential Council, which included the prime minister and many members of the imperial clan. Like the Liao, the Jin recruited Chinese and Jurchen officials on different tracks. Before 1183, the Chinese sat civil service examinations while the Jurchens were appointed to office, often on the basis of their father’s position. The Jin also followed the Liao practice of having five capitals, which the emperor visited over the course of the year.

Hoping to conquer South China, the Prince of Hailing attacked the Southern Song in 1159. He established a navy, a first for the Jurchens, staffed by some 30,000 Chinese. His land army consisted of 120,000 Jurchen troops on horseback and 150,000 Chinese soldiers on foot. Initially, the army conquered the Huai River valley, but the Song forces managed to drive them back. While the Prince of Hailing was at the front, one of his cousins overthrew him, showing the enduring tradition of tanistry. Hailing was so unpopular that later historians never called him emperor, just prince.

Emperor Shizong

Because the Chinese had gained a superior military position, the new emperor Shizong 世宗 (r. 1161–1189) had to renegotiate the terms of peace with the Chinese. Although the Song continued to pay the same amount of silk and silver to the Jin dynasty, they no longer used the ignominious word “tribute” for their payments.

In 1183, Emperor Shizong ordered the first in a series of censuses that provide unusually detailed information about the Chinese living in north China. Unlike most population

Table 13.1 Jin-dynasty Census Data

Year	Households	Individuals	Persons per household
1187	6,789,499	44,705,086	6.59
1190	6,939,000	45,447,900	6.55
1195	7,223,400	48,490,400	6.71
1207	8,413,164	53,532,151	6.33

surveys of China, the Jin enumeration provided both the number of households and, unusually, the size of the population (Table 13.1).

The census did not distinguish ethnicity, but a leading scholar of the Jin dynasty, the late Herbert Franke, suggests that four million people, or less than ten percent, were Jurchen or Kitan in a total population of over forty million. Almost everyone else was Chinese. Although the census does not break the population down by group, in other proclamations, the government divided everyone into two groups: the Jurchens and those of "various types," a category that included north Chinese, South Chinese, Kitan, and other non-Jurchen groups like the Parhae and the Mongols.

These households contained more people than the five people typical of Chinese households at this time. The larger household size may have been due to the high number of slaves in Jin society. Jin documents show a wide range of wealth, with some families owning large estates and others being forced to work the land. Because the census takers had reported the existence of large estates, the emperor ordered the distribution of free food to the Jurchens with much less land. He saw the disparity in wealth as a sign of the decay of Jurchen society, which he hoped to remedy by giving direct aid to the poor.

As part of his effort to revive Jurchen identity, Emperor Shizong, who himself had received a Chinese education in the classics, barred the Jurchens from adopting Chinese names and wearing Chinese-style clothing. He ordered all those at court to speak only Jurchen. Although Shizong encouraged the Jurchens to use their native tongue at court, it was already a dying language, which even the emperor's own son refused to study. The emperor professed great pleasure when a grandson spoke to him in Jurchen, but evidently the boy, who would succeed his grandfather to reign as Emperor Zhangzong 章宗 (1189–1208), could say only "thank you."

As part of his efforts to strengthen Jurchen, Emperor Shizong revived Jurchen as a language for recruitment via the civil service examinations. In 1164, the emperor ordered the translation of the Confucian classics and the creation of a Jurchen-language school system where some 3,000 students could study Jurchen. In 1173, the government held Jurchen-language examinations for the first time; its goal was to recruit not Jurchen-speaking officials but instead teachers who could impart knowledge of the Jurchen language to future generations. This year marked the completion of Jurchen-language translations of two dynastic histories, a guide to government attributed to the Tang founder, and a collection of model exam essays from the Tang dynasty. Not surprisingly, the first Jurchen-language exams asked questions that candidates could answer on the basis of these four books. By 1181, more books had been translated into Jurchen, and candidates had to pass three rounds, at their locality level, the provincial level, and the capital level, before they could be appointed as officials.

The earliest surviving Jurchen-language texts carved onto stone date to 1185 and 1186, a sign that the government's efforts to increase the use of the Jurchen language were succeeding.

(Some paper manuscripts with Jurchen script predate 1185, but their date is not certain.) The main texts of both inscriptions carved onto the front of the stone were in Chinese; the Jurchen texts accompanied those main texts, showing that the government envisioned the use of Jurchen alongside Chinese—not separate from it.

Emperor Shizong's policies did not seek to revive Jurchen as a spoken language. His goal was to make Jurchen a literary language like Chinese, complete with a literary canon of texts translated from Chinese, that could be tested on the civil service examinations. Everyone embraced the traditional Chinese emphasis on classical learning. No officials saw any contradiction between serving a Jurchen emperor and striving for a full knowledge of the Chinese classics, whether in the Chinese original or the Jurchen translation.

The Chinese-language examinations expanded greatly under Emperor Shizong. In the 1150s, only some sixty or seventy candidates passed the exams every three years, but the number leapt to 500 successful candidates every three years in the 1180s. The pass rate fluctuated between 25 and 33 percent, which was extremely high, and the ease of the civil service examinations had a major impact on local society. This was the one time in the history of north China when northerners did not have to compete with southern Chinese for positions in the government, and it marked a golden age for north Chinese scholars. Never again could they obtain government posts so easily.

Emperor Shizong's efforts to expand the civil service examinations contributed to the flourishing of Chinese scholarly culture in the late 1100s. Chinese scholars living in Jin territory saw no contradiction between serving an alien dynasty—which grew less and less alien over time—and the lifestyle of a scholar, which was richly described in a new literary form, “all-keys-and-modes” plays (*zhugongdiao* 諸宮調). These plays alternated passages of prose with stretches of poetry, which were written so they could be sung to preexisting tunes, which playwrights frequently switched—the reason for the name of these plays. Later generations who looked down on these plays did not preserve them, and only three all-keys-and-modes plays survive today from an original 700 or so.

The new dramas found a large audience immediately. Some fans were so enthusiastic that they included models of stages in their tombs, and the walls of one woman's tomb are decorated with verses from the latest play and nothing else. One of the surviving plays is a rewrite of a Tang-dynasty story about the abortive love affair of an examination candidate named Zhang with a girl named Oriole. Because only the playwright's last name is known, he is usually referred to as Master Dong 董, and he wrote *The Romance of the Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji* 西廂記) sometime between 1190 and 1208. The play was printed in the city of Pingyang in Shanxi province, which became a major publishing center during the Jin dynasty. The play introduces the hero by saying he “Vies with the paragons of old”:

Passionately fond of poetry and calligraphy,
An expert painter and musician,
He's an impeccable prose-writer (and a scrupulous man) as well.

This description shows how much the subjects of the Jin valued traditional Chinese skills.

The popularity of the Chinese-language civil service examinations led to a revival of Chinese learning in the second half of the twelfth century. The teachings of the northern Song thinker, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), gained a great following as students and officials alike embraced Su's emphasis on learning and culture. Strikingly, few people in north China studied the Confucian teachings of Zhu Xi 朱熹, so influential in South China at this time, although they first became available in Jin territory during the 1190s.

Complete self-realization Daoism

The Confucian emphasis on filial piety, or children's obligations to their parents, resonated with the population living under Jin rule and led to the growth of a new Daoist sect called the Complete Self-Realization (Quanzhen 全真) school, which arose in north China. The sect's founder, Wang Zhe 王喆 (1112–1170), consciously combined elements of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism to form a new belief system. Wang Zhe was born to a Chinese family in Shaanxi and survived the Jurchen conquest of north China. After receiving a traditional Chinese education, but failing the civil service examinations, he abandoned his studies and lived off of his family's wealth. The three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism were three legs of the same tripod, he taught, with the tripod representing the Dao, or the Way. Wang selected three texts, one from each tradition, for his followers to study: the *Classic of Filial Piety* from the Confucian tradition, the *Daodejing* from Daoism, and the *Heart Sutra* from Buddhism. Borrowing freely from the different traditions, he encouraged his followers to be celibate, to fast regularly, to follow a vegetarian diet, and to avoid alcohol.

Wang modified traditional Daoist promises of immortality to offer his followers a kind of inner peace—or self-realization in his terms—to be achieved through meditation. If his followers were able to practice meditation correctly, then they could achieve detachment from this world even as their physical bodies remained here. Even though Wang's teachings asked a great deal of his followers in their attempts to become fully realized beings, or to attain true self-cultivation, the teachings proved increasingly popular after his death. A ban on them in 1190 seems only to have encouraged their further spread.

Confucian learning under Emperor Zhangzong

When Emperor Shizong died in 1189, he was succeeded by his grandson who reigned until 1208. The new emperor Zhangzong 章宗 continued the civil service examinations, both in Chinese and Jurchen, and the pass rate in the 1200s was 600 successful candidates every three years, even higher than during Emperor Shizong's reign.

Emperor Zhangzong issued a new law code, the Taihe Code 泰和律, which was the final product of a century of changing law. Aguda had presided over a society with a traditional law system whose underlying principle was an eye for an eye. If they had sufficient funds, criminals could pay penalties and forego punishment, although their ears or nose would be cut off to show that they had broken the law. The Taihe Code drew heavily on the Tang Code, but it did make some concessions to Jurchen customs. It gave masters more power over their slaves and allowed Jurchen sons to establish their own households separate from their parents, a practice contrary to the Chinese ideal but consonant with Jurchen tradition.

Even more significant than the promulgation of a Chinese law code was Emperor Zhangzong's decision to select one of the five elements as the symbol of his dynasty. The Chinese believed in an ongoing cycle of five elements, and a dynasty's choice indicated which dynasty it saw itself as succeeding. In 1193, Emperor Zhangzong asked his advisors to choose the appropriate element. Depending on which element they chose, they could claim to be the legitimate successors of the Tang, the Liao, or the Northern Song.

In 1202, the emperor and his advisors decided that earth was the appropriate element for the Jin. In doing so, they were making the claim that the Jin, and not the Southern Song, was the legitimate successor to the Northern Song. One leading Confucian scholar of the time, Zhao Bingwen 趙秉文 (1159–1232), saw this decision as one of the emperor's greatest accomplishments. In an essay praising the emperor, he wrote "The virtue of the earth was

amplified so that the Central Plains was unified.” This was an extraordinary claim for an official in the service of a non-Chinese dynasty to make (and of course, as the Jin dynasty ruled only north China, the Central Plains—meaning the Chinese empire—was anything but unified). But by the year 1202, Zhao Bingwen saw nothing unusual in his statement. Still, however great its cosmological significance, the choice of a ruling element could not solve the recurrent problems the Jin faced at the turn of the century.

The last years of the Jin

Since the 1120s, the Yellow River had been flooding over its dikes, and in 1194, it shifted its course dramatically from north of the Shandong peninsula to south of it. Because the flooding continued for thirty years after the river had changed course, and because the floods wiped out crops over a large area, many cultivators could not pay the agricultural taxes that they owed the Jin government. The shortfall coincided with problems in currency. The Jin faced a shortage of bronze coins, but they had no copper deposits to exploit. Finance officials experimented with different currencies—iron, silver, paper money backed by silver—but they continued to issue paper notes with lower and lower purchasing power, which created a complicated and unstable financial situation.

Just as the Jin government was struggling with these financial problems, they faced enemies on both the north and south. In 1206, the Southern Song decided to launch an attack. The chief minister Han Tuozhou 韓侂胄 (1152–1207) led a force of some 160,000 against the Jin forces of 130,000, hoping that the Chinese living in Jin territory would shift allegiances, but they did not. The opposite actually occurred. When a Chinese general in Sichuan who commanded 70,000 troops defected to the Jin, many Song troops deserted to his side. After several decisive Jin victories, it was clear to both sides that the Song were unable to reconquer the north, and Han Tuozhou was murdered after being dismissed from office. The Jin demanded Han Tuozhou’s head, which the Song lacquered and sent north in a box, a gesture embodying their humiliating defeat.

Pressed financially, the Jin rulers were eager to sue for peace and to resume payments from the Song, which they raised by 50,000 ounces of silver and 50,000 bolts of silk. In 1214, the Jin requested twice the annual payment from the Song to make up for alleged shortfalls, but the Song refused to pay anything at all.

The Jin desperately needed the revenues from the settlement to mount a force against a new enemy to their north, the Mongols, who first attacked in 1206, and continued to do so thereafter. Continued flooding in the Yellow River coincided with a drought across most of north China, and the Jin emperor decided to retreat to the southernmost of the five capitals, Kaifeng. The Mongols interpreted the retreat as further preparation for war, and they drove the much-weakened Jin south to just a sliver of land between the Yellow and Huai River valleys. In 1215, the Mongols took the Jin capital of Beijing. The Jin managed to hang on until 1234, when their capital at Kaifeng fell, but the once-powerful dynasty was reduced to a minor regional power for the last twenty years of its existence.

Conclusion: the legacy of the Kitans and the Jurchens

The Kitans designed the dual administration, the crucial innovation that allowed a non-Chinese minority to govern a mixed population. The Kitans, under Abaoji’s leadership, established a north-facing administration for the Kitans and a south-facing administration for the Chinese. They were fully capable of conquering the area north of the Yellow River, as

they showed in 947 and again in 1004, but they could not administer such a large area in the long run. After the Treaty of Chanyuan, they retained control over a huge band of grasslands to the north of China and of the area around Beijing.

The Kitans succeeded in protecting their traditional way of life and their language even as they adopted many Chinese customs. Between 938 and 983, they used the word Kitan for their own realm and referred to the conquered Chinese territories as the Liao. This distinction presages the later Qing innovation of constructing an empire with different sections, each with its own language and governmental system.

The successors to the Kitans, the Jurchens, succeeded where the Kitans failed. They not only conquered north China but also ruled it for over a century. The Kitans required their conquered male subjects to shave their heads in the Kitan hairstyle as a sign of their submission. Similarly, after conquering north China in 1126, the Jurchens ordered Chinese men to shave their foreheads, wear their hair long down their backs, often braided, and put on Jurchen-style clothing to display their subordinate status. Because of difficulty enforcing these orders, the Jurchens canceled them after just a few months, but when the Manchus took over the empire in 1644, they successfully imposed the same requirement of shaving the forehead and wearing a long braid, called a queue. This policy provided a visible reminder for the conquered Chinese of their subject status.

The Jin government also distinguished two groups: the Jurchens and those of "various types," a category that included north and South Chinese, and other non-Jurchen groups like the Kitans, Parhae, and Mongols. After they conquered China, the Mongols divided the population into four groups: the Mongols, the north Chinese, the South Chinese, and the people of "various types," showing how useful this new way of thinking of their subjects was to non-Chinese rulers.

The Jurchens took the Liao innovation of dual government an important step farther. They adopted the structure of Chinese bureaucracy and the means of recruiting for it via examinations, while reserving the highest positions in the government for native Jurchens. They selected those Jurchens more often on the basis of recommendation than via the Jurchen-language civil service examinations, which were held for the first time in 1173.

The Jurchens created a new mid-level administrative unit, the circuit, between the locality and the emperor. All later provinces, the administrative unit in use even today, were based on the circuits of the Jin. The Liao were the first to name Beijing as a capital, and the Jurchens did so as well. The modern visitor to Beijing will still find traces of the Liao and Jin presence but none of the Song because the Song never ruled the city. Both the Mongols and the Manchus built their capital at Beijing.

The Jurchens made an important breakthrough in Chinese history. They modified the Liao system of dual government so that the best-educated Chinese scholars, men like Zhao Bingwen, could serve a non-Chinese ruler and still feel that they were advancing the values of Chinese civilization. Chinese scholar-bureaucrats cooperated with the Jurchens by teaching them how to govern Chinese-style and by helping them to design a bureaucracy along Chinese lines. Assisting the Jurchen emperors in gathering legal precedents, they drafted the *Taihe* legal code. These Chinese scholars also explained the theory of the five elements and participated in the debates in Zhangzong's court over which element best signified the Jin dynasty's place in history.

The Jin formulated their claim to succeed the Northern Song just a few years before the Mongols attacked them in 1206 and irrevocably weakened their dynasty. The Jurchens, in concert with their Chinese advisors, devised the formula that allowed subsequent non-Chinese dynasties—the Mongols and then the Manchus—to rule China. In the twentieth

century, nationalistic Chinese historians did their best to argue that Chinese civilization under non-Chinese rule broke from the norm, but in fact, for much of the last thousand years of Chinese history, and particularly in the north, non-Chinese rule was the norm.

Note

- 1 Franke and Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 6, 265–66 [citing *Beifeng yangsha lu* 25.25b].

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