

The Price of Orthodoxy: Issues of Legitimacy in the Later Liang and Later Tang*

Fang, Cheng-hua**

Abstract

After the decline of the Tang imperial authority in the late ninth century, a number of local warlords competed to erect autonomous regimes by force, gradually establishing their own dynasties. The first two dynasties after the end of the Tang, the Later Liang and the Later Tang, grew out of the rival regimes established by Zhu Wen and Li Keyong. Both Zhu and Li were bellicose generals, but who increasingly came to realize the importance of legitimacy in the process of building their national regimes.

To legitimize his power, Zhu Wen claimed that the Tang orthodox authority had been transmitted to him. In contrast, Li Keyong and his son legitimized their fight against Zhu by claiming that they carried the standard of Tang restoration. Although adopting different approaches, both two military-oriented regimes turned to civil issues, such as organizing the bureaucracy and performing rituals. From a cultural perspective, the political leaders' interest in civil affairs preserved and promoted Confucian tradition under violent conditions. Their claims to orthodoxy before they effectively controlled all of China, however, retarded the military actions of these two regimes, because the attention of their rulers was diverted from the battlefield to civil affairs. This article will analyze the relationship between military expansion and the management of legitimation in both the Later Liang and the Later Tang. The short lives of the Later Liang and the Later Tang, I argue, are partly attributable to their emperors' efforts at legitimation. Military might rather than the appearance of orthodox dynastic practice was crucial to the fortunes of these two dynasties, but the emperors seemed to overemphasize the latter over the former.

Keywords: the Five Dynasties period, the Later Liang, the Later Tang, legitimacy, orthodoxy, Zhu Wen, Li Cunxu, Heavenly Mandate, bureaucracy.

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** Assistant Professor, Department of History, National Taiwan University.

Introduction

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Introduction

The final quarter of the ninth century in Chinese history is filled with military conflict, court scandal and factional politics. The Huang Chao Rebellion, from 875 to 884, destroyed the authority of the Tang court. On the heels of this power vacancy, a number of insubordinate generals competed to erect autonomous regimes by force of arms, which commenced a political division of China destined to last more than a half-century. In the first half of the tenth century, five short-lived dynasties ruled northern China in succession, causing historians to designate the period as “The Five Dynasties” era. The first two dynasties, the Later Liang and the Later Tang, originated from the rival regimes established by former Tang generals Zhu Wen 朱溫 (852-912) and Li Keyong 李克用 (856-908).

The troops of Zhu Wen and Li Keyong contributed critically to defeating the rebel Huang Chao 黃巢 (d. 884). Soon after the termination of rebellion, however, cooperation between the two generals turned to hostility and the wars between them that began in 884 would last several decades. Through bloody fighting, Zhu Wen’s troops gradually overwhelmed Li’s forces and placed a diminished Tang court under his thumb at the outset of the tenth century. In 907, Zhu dethroned the Tang emperor and established his own dynasty, the Later Liang. Like usurpers in previous periods, Zhu faced a crucial problem: how to legitimize his enthronement. At a time when numerous autonomous powers coexisted across the Middle Kingdom, the matter assumed greater urgency than usual. Like other leaders of regional powers, Zhu established his regime through warfare and

little else. How might he prove that he, above other rival overlords, deserved the “Heavenly Mandate”?

As his erstwhile enemy proclaimed himself emperor, Li Keyong had the opportunity to justify his ongoing fight against Zhu Wen as part of his life’s mission to restore continuity in the Tang imperial line, intentionally diminishing the personal factors behind their historic feud. After Li died in 908, his son Li Cunxu 李存勖 (885-926) went further by proclaiming himself successor to the Tang imperial family, creating the dynasty dubbed by historians as the “Later Tang.” Thus, Cunxu also needed to demonstrate his qualifications to be the emperor of China, particularly as a man of Shatuo ancestry. By the tenth century, Chinese political institutions were quite mature, the model for an orthodox dynasty erected by Confucian thinkers and historians for over a millennium. In search of an ideology of orthodoxy, Zhu and Li had no alternative to Confucian tradition and needed to engage in civil enterprises such as rituals, music and laws to achieve their goals. Clearly, establishing the legitimacy of a dynasty required measures different from a satrapy, while both Zhu and Li shared a common estrangement from civil traditions. Coming from a lower social stratum, Zhu Wen and his cohort of military aides lacked literary knowledge and were alienated from Confucian tradition. The same applies to Li Cunxu and his officials, due to their non-Han ethnicity and long-term military careers. For this reason, meeting traditional expectations was not easy for the dynastic founders in the tenth century, which forced them to cooperate with literati. Thus, along with the heightened need for legitimation, Zhu Wen and Li Cunxu reconsidered the functions of civil officials in their governments and gradually promoted the status and power of learned men.

Traditionally, historians have associated rulers of the Five Dynasties with martial identity, and described their governments as the reign of warriors.¹ By examining the initial two short-lived dynasties of the period,

1 This image of the Five Dynasties period has been repeated by Chinese historians since the eleventh century. See Richard Davis’s “Introduction,” to Ouyang Xiu, translated by Richard L. Davis, *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), iv-v.

the Later Liang and the Later Tang, this article tries to reveal another side of these presumed military leaders. In pursuit of legitimacy, emperors of the Later Liang and Later Tang turned their attention to civil management with the intent of adopting civil tradition to consolidate their power. This civil inclination changed the original orientation and later fortunes of their governments. This article will analyze how the issue of legitimacy influenced the development of these two dynasties, politically and culturally.

I. From Military Might to Legitimate Authority

Like most local military strongmen in the late Tang, the Later Liang founder Zhu Wen originated from a lower social stratum. Losing his father in his youth, Zhu lived as a house retainer and often suffered beatings from his master, until he joined Huang Chao's troops.² Illustrating his capacity in battle, Zhu gained quick promotions among rebel forces, but reverted his men and his lands to Tang sovereignty after 882, due to pessimism about the potential of the rebellion under its current leadership. His surrender helped Tang armies to expel rebels from the capital, Changan 長安. In 883, the court appointed him as the Zhongwu Governor (*zhongwu jiedushi* 忠武節度使), a command centering on Bianliang 汴梁 (modern Kaifeng 開封). From this base, Zhu gradually conquered the surrounding areas controlled by rebels and other local governors to establish his own regime in northern China.³

Primarily concerned with military expansion, Zhu Wen had little interest in civil affairs. His regional command was mainly composed of

2 For the early career of Zhu Wen, see Robert Somers, "The End of the T'ang," in *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 781-782.

3 On the process of Zhu Wen's territorial expansion, see Wang Gungwu, *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), 48-84.

military types, with generals occupying the most influential posts. The majority of his comrades were soldiers, who like him hailed mostly from a lower social stratum that included bandits and peasants. These followers won promotion through longstanding military service to Zhu.⁴ The absence of literary background combined by a career focused on combat would make it difficult for Zhu to identify with the civil elite. The following story illustrates his antipathy toward them:

[Zhu] Quanzhong [Zhu Wen] once sat under a large willow tree with his staff and guests, as Quanzhong spoke up: "This willow is suitable for making an axle." No one responded to his words until several guests stood and parroted back: "It is fit for an axle." An irritated Quanzhong said in strong voice: "Bookworms like to echo the views of others to manipulate them - here is an example. An axle must be made of elm, so it is impossible to make axles from willow." Zhu soon looked to his followers and said: "What are you waiting for?" Several tens of underlings seized those who had called it "suitable for an axle" and killed them all. 全忠嘗與僚佐及遊客坐於大柳之下，全忠獨言曰：「此柳宜為車轂。」眾莫應。有遊客數人起應曰：「宜為車轂。」全忠勃然厲聲曰：「書生輩好順口玩人，皆此類也！車轂須用夾榆，柳木豈可為之！」顧左右曰：「尚何待！」左右數十人，猝言「宜為車轂」者悉撲殺之。⁵

The men dubbed by Zhu as "bookworms" and then assassinated were undeniably literati. And the incident reveals Zhu's brutal treatment of literati in his domain. Zhu's chief interest in learned men at the time related solely to their potential contribution to military operations. For example, upon first conversing with Jing Xiang 敬翔 (d. 923), an expert on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, he asked quite practically about the potential of

4 Hori Toshikazu 堀敏一, "Shu Zenchu Seiken no Seikaku 朱全忠政權の性格," *Sundai shigaku* 駿台史學, No. 11 (1960, Tokyo), 44-46; Mao Hanguang 毛漢光, "Wudai zhi zhengzhi yanxu yu zhengquan zhuan yi 五代之政治延續與政權轉移," in his *Zhongguo zhonggu zhengzhi shilun* 中國中古政治史論 (Taipei: Lianjin chubanshe, 1990), 412-424.

5 Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (punctuated edition, Taipei: Huashi chubanshe, 1987) [hereafter ZZTJ], 256:8644.

applying knowledge of Spring and Autumn warfare to his current martial enterprise.⁶

With his expanding influence, however, a bellicose Zhu Wen gradually came to realize the importance of legitimacy and began to refine his image. Starting as early as 890, he started to turn to the Tang court in seeking authorization for his own military adventures. In the third month of that year, Zhu submitted a memorial recommending the appointment of civil officials of repute and pedigree as provincial governors in the east, while promising to crush any who resisted such arrangements.⁷ To a court lacking the military might to enforce its own directives, Zhu's proposal coincided with their own wish to revive central authority. Zhu's real objective was quite selfish and self-serving. Civil appointees without their own military entourage would only end up as puppets of Zhu himself. And when some other governor refused orders from the court, Zhu could carry the banner of the court in campaigns against these insubordinate leaders, which provided him an excellent pretext to legitimize his territorial expansion.

To win court patronage, Zhu tried to establish personal connections with top officials at court while ingratiating himself with the throne. Even when the court rejected a specific request from him, he avoided direct conflict or insubordination, unlike most local strongmen at the time.⁸ He would deftly engage in the histrionics of deference for the emperor or civil officials, even though his support was more superficial than substantive. For example, when Zhu's armies occupied Xuzhou 徐州 forcing Governor Shi Fu 時溥 (d. 893) to commit suicide, in 893, he urged the court to appoint a civil official as the new governor. However, he soon expelled that appointee and forced the court accept his own general, Zhang Tingfan

6 Tao Yue 陶岳, *Wudaishi bu* 五代史補 (Chanhua an congshu edition, Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian, 1994), 1:1-2.

7 Liu Xu 劉昫, *Jiu tangshu* 舊唐書 (punctuated edition, Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1985) [hereafter *JTS*], 20a:740.

8 Sun Guangxian 孫光憲, *Beimeng suoyan* 北夢瑣言 (punctuated edition, Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 1983) [hereafter *BMSY*], 14:108.

張廷範 (d. 905), as replacement governor.⁹ Zhu's cunning proved successful at winning wide support among court officials, so prime ministers who struggled with eunuchs, such as Zhang Jun 張濬 (d. 904) in 890 and Cui Yin 崔胤 (854-904) in 900, considered Zhu as a valued ally.¹⁰ Due to the support of leading officials, Zhu Wen could legitimize his military actions and intervene in court affairs.

Along with the expansion of his influence, moreover, Zhu Wen intended to change his image from a brave general to an ideal ruler, no longer concerned with martial victory alone. In 900, for example, he led troops to attack Wang Rong 王鎔 (873-921), the governor of Zhenzhou 鎮州, proclaiming his intention to eliminate Wang's power completely. Unable to resist Zhu's troops, Wang sent civil aide Zhou Shi 周式 (?) to negotiate a truce. Realizing Zhu's ambition to control the whole of China, Zhou persuaded him to forgo an attack by arguing for the need to achieve hegemony by venerating etiquette and righteousness, instead of relying on armed forces and warfare. Zhu chose to embrace the idea and accepted Wang's surrender, allowing him continue to control his domain.¹¹ In 906, Zhu Wen invaded the territory of Liu Rengong 劉仁恭 (d. 914) and laid siege to Cangzhou 滄州, then defended by Rengong's son Liu Shouwen 劉守文 (d. 908). Lacking external support, the garrisons in Cangzhou soon exhausted their provisions, so Zhu invited Liu Shouwen to surrender. Characterizing himself as a leader intent on controlling the entire world by "great righteousness," Liu responded, Zhu should not force a son to betray his own father. Zhu could think of no appropriate retort and thus delayed his final attack on Cangzhou, and three months later, abandoned his siege. He did order his men, predictably, to destroy their own provisions before retreating, only for Liu Shouwen to appeal to Zhu to leave some of the residual provisions for the exhausted residents in Cangzhou. Zhu agreed

9 The court-appointed Governor was Sun Chu 孫儲(?), See "Kaoyi 考異," in *ZZTJ*, 259:8442-8443. On the appointment of Zhang Tingfan, see *ZZTJ*, 259:8455.

10 See the biographies of Zhan Jun and Cui Yin in *JTS*, 179:4657-4660, 177:4583-4586 separately.

11 *ZZTJ*, 262:8534.

this request, so Shouwen's people were even able to survive after the ravages of war.¹² The two cases reveal that Zhu Wen was no longer the savage general who deployed troops without rules or discipline, having evolved into a reasonable leader who reached decisions under moral considerations.

His growing concern for righteousness and justice caused Zhu Wen increasingly to appreciate Confucian learning and literary works, if only to serve as political propaganda. His burgeoning appreciation of literary scholars is reflected in his response to a letter of rapprochement from Li Xiji 李襲吉 (d. 906), a civil retainer of Li Keyong known for scholarly achievements. Zhu said to staff member Jing Xiang:

Li Keyong's power has diminished so that he can only survive in a small area. However, the letter of Xiji possesses the force equal to an army two hundred thousand troops strong. This is a case of 'Their having the talent to rival ours.' Combining my intelligence and cunning with Xiji's literary talents would be similar to a tiger sprouting wings. 李公斗絕一隅，削弱如此，襲吉一函，抵二十萬兵勢，所謂「彼有人可當也」。如吾之智算，得襲吉之筆才，虎傳翼矣。¹³

As Zhu saw it, although his own astute strategies could suffice to win victory in war, only by drawing additionally upon men of literary talents could he accomplish his grander ambitions. For this reason, he recruited a group of literati as civil staff, and they became important consultants in the decision-making processes. Among them, Jing Xiang emerged as Zhu Wen's primary advisor. Originating from a civil aristocratic family, Jing would serve under Zhu for thirty years, participating in all important decisions and traveling with him during military operations.¹⁴

Successful military actions complemented by astutely devised political propaganda ultimately allowed Zhu Wen to win a dominant

12 ZZTJ, 265:8662, 8665.

13 Li Fang 李昉, *Taiping Yulan* 太平御覽 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1975), 595:10.

14 Xue Juzheng 薛居正, *Jiu wudai shi* 舊五代史 (punctuated edition, Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1985) [hereafter JWDS], 18:246-248.

position in North China during the 900s, whittling down the troop strength of his primary rival, Li Keyong, and confining him to the Hedong 河東 command of northern Shanxi 山西. Under such favorable circumstances, in 904 Zhu relocated the Tang emperor from Chanan to Luoyang 洛陽, close to his headquarters at Bianling. Soon, he killed Emperor Zhaozong 昭宗 (r. 888-904) and installed a young prince as his veritable puppet.¹⁵ Prominent court officials that Zhu considered potential opponents faced similarly tragic ends as well, allies of Zhu replacing them. After effectively controlling the court, Zhu was ready to build a new dynasty.

II. The Founding of a New Dynasty

No power could prevent Zhu Wen from dethroning the Tang emperor, but before proclaiming himself emperor a patient Zhu tried to reunite the whole of China by armed might. In the eleventh month of 905 and the twelfth month of 906, however, Zhu's troops suffered significant setbacks in Huainan 淮南 to his south and Hebei 河北 to his north, respectively.¹⁶ To balance these military failures, Zhu tried to use political methods to consolidate the loyalty of his subordinates and weaken his enemies. Because all serious rivals fought in the name of Tang imperial authority, Zhu expected to undermine his rivals' morale by pronouncing the end of the Tang dynasty. In the first month of 907, he decided to usurp the throne.¹⁷

To legitimize his usurpation, Zhu Wen intended to acclaim that his ascent was a consequence of Heavenly intervention, not personal ambition. For such propagandist purposes, he would enshroud his usurpation in

15 *ZZTJ*, 264:8630-8632, 265:8635-8636.

16 *ZZTJ*, 265:8650, 266:8668.

17 Zhu Wen's ascent was triggered by General Luo Shaowei 羅紹威 (877-910), who suggested that Zhu Wen preclude the possibility of the Tang emperor's resuscitation by taking the throne himself. See *JWDS*, 3:45, 14:190.

assorted rituals, believing imperial authority to be closely related to rituals. In late 905, for example, he executed Prime Minister Liu Can 柳燦 (d. 908), his former trusted retainer, only because Liu had organized sacrifice to Heaven for the new-installed Tang emperor. Zhu believed that Liu betrayed him and intend to buttress Tang imperial authority through the ritual.¹⁸ The incident reveals the importance that Zhu attached rituals, the focus of his attention as he prepared for enthronement.

Zhu Wen's stress on imperial rituals offered an opportunity for remaining Tang civil officials to contribute to the founding of Zhu's dynasty, thereby indebting the new dynasty to them. While originally lacking personal connections with the usurper, these Tang bureaucrats possessed the knowledge he needed. Led by Prime Minister Xue Yiju 薛貽矩 (d. 912), they evinced every enthusiasm for the proper conduct of rituals occasioning the transfer of the "Heavenly Mandate." The Confucian ideal of "voluntary abdication" (*shanrang* 禪讓) would be exploited by Zhu and his cronies to compel the puppet emperor to announce his impending abdication to Zhu Wen. Several times as decorum required, Zhu rejected the Tang emperor's edict of abdication, only for officials in and away from court to plead for his accession. Their petitions coincided with reports of astrological omens and miracles, unmistakable signs of Heaven's sanction for the new dynasty. The whole process continued for three months before Zhu felt satisfied about the legitimacy of his accession and assumed the throne based on the prescribed rituals, in the fourth month of 907.¹⁹

Zhu Wen's enthronement rituals accompanied with other civil enterprises also functioned to announce the beginning of a new orthodox dynasty. The emperor personally offered sacrifice to Heaven twice in 909, representing his appreciation for the Heaven's patronage.²⁰ Four temples were built to offer sacrifice to the new emperor's ancestors.²¹ The court

18 *ZZTJ*, 265:8651.

19 *JWDS*, 3:45-48; *ZZTJ*, 266:8669-8673. Historians usually designate Zhu Wen's dynasty as "Later Liang" to distinguish it from the former Liang dynasty in the sixth century.

20 Wang Pu 王溥, *Wudai huiyao* 五代會要 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1970), 2:19.

21 *JWDS*, 3:49, 142:1893.

began the codifying of new legal codes, completed in 910. Then, the emperor ordered all local governments to destroy copies of the Tang code and follow the new regulations.²² To manage these civil affairs, the government needed information from books and documents. After his ascent, Zhu Wen thus sought to enhance the court's collections by ordering the general Yang Shihou 楊師厚 (d. 915) to transfer to the capital books obtained after the defeat of Zhao Kuanning 趙匡凝(?), a bibliophile who ruled as autonomous governor in Xiangyang 襄陽.²³ To exhibit their respect for Confucius, in 909, the court built a new Confucian temple, while the government had budget deficit. The court even cut the monthly salary of every official to cover the cost of this construction.²⁴ Apparently, these various enterprises helped to continue civil tradition, which had been in jeopardy since the late ninth century.

Following Confucian tradition, Zhu Wen believed that rites and warfare were the most critical matters for any dynasty, causing him to appoint Prime Minister Xue Yiju to supervise the conduct of every sort of sacrifice across the whole country.²⁵ He also firmly believed that the sacrifices to Heaven, as well as sacrifices to mountains and rivers, would have a critical impact on agriculture, and a sound agriculture was necessary to meeting the needs of army and government. To emphasize the importance of these cults at a time of harsh weather and natural calamities, the emperor often sent prime ministers with other high ranking court officials to offer sacrifices to mountains and rivers; these had been the duty of lower-level officials in the Tang dynasty.²⁶ These ritual missions were undertaken frequently, as in the fifth, eighth, and ninth months of 910, when prime ministers were sent to several hotspots to manage cults.²⁷ The action reflects the status of former Tang civil officials under the new

22 *JWDS*, 147:1961-1962.

23 *JWDS*, 3:55, 17:235.

24 *JWDS*, 5:81.

25 Wang Pu 王溥, *Wudai huiyao*, 4:41.

26 *JWDS*, 6:99.

27 Wang Qinruo 王欽若, *Cefu yuanhui* 冊府元龜 (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1967), 193:14.

regime of Zhu Wen. Lacking trust in most former bureaucrats of Tang, Zhu placed substantial power in the hands of a small cohort of trusted retainers, such as Jing Xiang and Li Zhen 李振 (d. 923).²⁸ Although retaining high-level posts under the new government, the purpose of these Tang expatriates was only to apply their expertise in ritual affairs to make the Later Liang possess the appearances of an orthodox dynasty.

From a political perspective, Zhu Wen's efforts at legitimization had only limited success. The strongest of nomadic tribes in the north, the Khitan, along with most local governors in the Chinese heartland may well have submitted to the new emperor, but not Zhu Wen's longtime rivals: Li Keyong, Li Maozhen 李茂貞 (856-924), Wang Jian 王建 (847-918) and Yang Wuo 楊渥 (886-908).²⁹ The Shanxi base of Li Keyong remained an ongoing threat to the new dynasty, its satrapy at Hedong both sizable and strategically important. The scandalous usurpation of Zhu Wen only solidified the moral leverage of Li's camp as the sole remaining defender of the Tang imperial family. In the past, Zhu Wen's supporters at the Tang court had successfully cast Li Keyong in the image of a disloyal general, excluding him from the court's patronage in the process. Under the prodding of Zhu Wen, the court even organized a large-scale campaign against Li in 890, though the armies of the central government failed soon afterwards.³⁰ Even after his armies delivered the Tang emperor from the clutches of his own governors, in 895, Li was denied a petition for a personal audience with the emperor, ostensibly for fear that he might place the court under his own thumb.³¹ These events reveal Li's inability to refine his image and legitimize the expansion of his own power. After Zhu's enthronement, however, Li finally won the opportunity to alter his image by rejecting suggestions that he enthrone himself as emperor. While other anti-Liang governors, such as Wang Jian and Li Maozhen, had

28 Wang Gungwu, *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties*, 90-92.

29 ZZTJ, 266:8675-8676.

30 Robert Somers, "The End of the T'ang," 774-776.

31 JWDS, 26:350-353; ZZTJ, 260:8481.

enthroned themselves,³² Li posed as a loyal Tang official, fighting to restore the Tang dynasty.

Li Keyong died in the first month of 908, his son Cunxu inheriting his power as well as his policy of fighting for a restoration of Tang sovereignty. As Zhu Wen preoccupied himself with the business of accession, he slighted the war around Luzhou 潞州, where Liang generals had besieged Li Keyong's armies since the sixth month of 907. Zhu Wen's occupation with civil issues provided a military opportunity for his enemy. In the fifth month of 908, Li Cunxu led his well-prepared armies in a surprise raid against Liang troops in Luzhou, slaying more than ten thousand and prevailing.³³ Thereafter, Li Cunxu gradually expanded his territory in the Hebei area, and posed a serious threat to the Later Liang dynasty.

III. The Power of Rituals

In the face of Li Cunxu's new challenge, the founding emperor of the Later Liang realized that political propaganda would not dampen the spirits of this particular foe, so he turned his attention to combat once again. For the rest of his life, Zhu busied himself with treks from Bianliang, his capital, to assorted battlefields, but his military efforts realized few significant gains.³⁴ The primary factor halting Zhu's military achievement was the distrust between the emperor and local generals. His enthronement apparently failed to consolidate the loyalty of the Liang generals, nor did it boost Zhu's confidence in his status. Zhu always controlled his military officials with suspicion, and executed anyone revealing any indication of treachery. His rigorous policy produced intermittent mutinies, not only undermining his own military power but also preventing the Liang forces

32 *JWDS*, 26:360-361; *ZZTJ*, 266:8675.

33 *JWDS*, 27:368-369; *ZZTJ*, 266:8694.

34 Zhu Wen, at least four times, personally commanded campaigns against Li Cunxu. See *ZZTJ*, 267:8704, 8725-8726, 268:8746, 8752.

from concentrating on fighting against Li Cunxu.³⁵

Along with the expansion of rival powers, the emperor's health became worse. After suffering a crushing defeat by Li Cunxu's troops in 912, the emperor fell seriously ill, his illness creating rifts within the ruling family over the succession, as none of his sons had been assigned as the heir-apparent. Eager for the throne, third son Zhu Yougui 朱友珪 (d. 913) would assassinate the emperor and assume the throne in the sixth month of 912. This regicide induced widespread anger across a spectrum of Liang officials in addition to the pretender's brothers. Eight months later, Zhu Youzhen 朱友貞 (887-923), Zhu Wen's fourth son, cooperating with generals of the palace armies, killed Zhu Yougui to become the last emperor of the Later Liang.³⁶

Although his father was famed for military talents, Zhu Youzhen's fondness for Confucian knowledge and the literati possessing it would surpass any martial capacities. Zhu Wen's heightened appreciation of literati clearly produced a favorable environment for Youzhen to develop his acculturation into the literary world. The cultural differences between the two emperors thus partly emanated from legitimation efforts in the political sphere. Symptomatic of this civil orientation is Youzhen's interest in preserving the historical record. After his enthronement, the court started to compile records pertaining to the history of the Tang as well as contemporary events of the Liang, an enterprise that had eluded his father.³⁷ Because the preservation of historical records had been the routine practice of orthodox dynasties of old, Youzhen's ambition to compile histories and preserve historical records was also shaped by the agenda of dynastic legitimacy. The chaos in the late ninth century had

35 Wang Gungwu, *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties*, 121-124; Mao Hanguang, "Wudai zhi zhengzhi yanxu yu zhengquan zhuanqi," 422.

36 *JWDS*, 8:113-115.

37 During Zhu Youzhen's reign, his civil officials completed the Veritable Record of his father. See *JWDS*, 18:250. For further discussion of the writing of historical texts during the Five Dynasties period, see Wang Gungwu, "The Chiu Wu-tai Shih and History-writing during the Five Dynasties," *Asia Major*, vol. VI, Part 1 (1957), 1-22.

destroyed most books and documents in government repositories, so the court sought to collect items from non-government sources, a determination not to be thwarted even by recurrent military crises. Even in the face of the impending peril at the hands of Li Cunxu, in 921, the court still issued an edict encouraging people to submit their private records on the Tang period to aid in the compilation of a dynastic history.³⁸

During the ten years of his reign, Zhu Youzhen faced more military challenges than his father. The invasion of Li Cunxu's troops, on the one hand, incurred serious setbacks for the Later Liang; intermittent internal uprisings, on the other hand, debilitated the emperor's control within his lands.³⁹ Under such dire circumstances, it was more urgent for Zhu Youzhen to address the military crisis than develop literary culture. Thus, some officials believed that Zhu Youzhen's civil outreaches might refine his image as Confucian emperor but destroy his dynasty. Confronted with this reality, Prime Minister Jing Xiang once criticized the emperor for merely "preserving the civil tradition through Confucian elegance 儒雅守文," while failing to take personal command of his armies. This makes it impossible, Jing argued, for the Liang to stand down Li Cunxu, who often engaged in dangerous hands-on combat alongside his soldiers.⁴⁰ Unable to personally command troops, the emperor needed senior generals to direct large-scale campaigns. Putting numerous troops in the hands of those veterans, however, the inexperienced emperor felt anxious about potential treachery. Imperial messengers were thus sent to supervise military actions, and intervened in military decisions. General Liu Xun 劉鄩 (858-921), chief commander in the war against Li Cunxu in 915, once complained to his subordinate generals that the emperor's seclusion in the palace left him impervious to military operations and the appropriate timing for them,

38 *JWDS*, 10:145-146.

39 In 915, local troops of the Weibo 魏博 district mutinied; in 918, the Governor of Yanzhou 兗州 surrendered to Li Cunxu; in 920, the Governor of Hezhong 河中 rebelled; in 921, the Prefect of Chenzhou 陳州 rebelled. See *ZZTJ*, 270:8834, 271:8854, 8865.

40 *JWDS*, 18:249.

which would eventually ruin the campaign.⁴¹ Liu's prediction came true, as the emperor's intervention in his decision-making became a leading factor in the fiasco of Liang armies in the second month of 916.⁴²

The emperor's ineptitude in military command caused the war against Li Cunxu to evolve into a huge burden for his state, politically and militarily. Unable to suppress the enemy through force, Zhu Youzhen resorted to civil alternatives to confirm his legal standing. In 917, Zhao Yan 趙巖 (d. 923), the emperor's most trusted retainer, argued: "Since Your Majesty has taken the throne, you have not offered sacrifices to Heaven. Critics thus consider you as no different from local lords, so people across the four corners hold you in contempt. 陛下踐阼以來，尚未南郊，議者以為無異藩侯，為四方所輕。"⁴³ The proposal to offer sacrifices to Heaven in the southern suburbs faced stiff opposition from Jing Xiang, who argued from a pragmatic stand. The war against Li Cunxu had exhausted both the people and the government, Jing argued, the cost of Heavenly sacrifices was likely to further ruin the finances of the government. Thus, conduct of the ritual might provide the emperor some vainglory in terms of image, but at substantial losses. Only after eliminating Li Cunxu's ominous threat, Jing insisted, were Heavenly sacrifices appropriate and timely.⁴⁴ The emperor ignored this censure and enthusiastically went to Luoyang to prepare this sacrifice. Just before the ceremony, however, news of Li's troops approaching Bianliang caused the emperor to cancel the rite and scurry back to the capital.⁴⁵ The Liang government had spent substantially to produce ritual paraphernalia and make other preparations, but got nothing in return.

The controversy over the Heavenly sacrifice reveals a divergence of ideas within the Later Liang political elite about the function of rituals. To Zhu Youzhen and Zhao Yan, ritual sacrifices would effectively confirm the

41 *JWDS*, 23:311.

42 *JWDS*, 23:311-312; *ZZTJ*, 269:8800.

43 *ZZTJ*, 270:8822.

44 *JWDS*, 9:132.

45 *ZZTJ*, 270:8823.

fact of sovereignty by offering the solution to problems of legitimation. As Jing Xiang saw it, however, rites might well enhance the image of dynasty, but merely aggravate the practical problems. He insisted that Heavenly sacrifice could only take place as climax to military feats. Taking into consideration their diverging cultural backgrounds suggests a significant phenomenon as pertains to policy decisions. Emanating from a civil aristocratic family, Jing had adhered to Confucian tradition since youth. His long-term literary education, however, did not foster in him romantic visions of the power of ritual to achieve the impossible. Compared with Jing, Zhu Youzhen and Zhao Yan, both sons of military men, were less literary but believed strongly in the symbolic power of rituals to consolidate authority.⁴⁶ This would suggest that recently acculturated military men might have more unrealistic expectations of rituals. Originally, these military strongmen relied on armed force alone but later turned their attention to civil affairs for practical reasons of legitimation. The newness of their contact with Confucianism and literary knowledge perhaps caused these men not to understand the exact function of civil management. For this reason, they placed more unrealistic hope on ritual than the civil elite. Unfortunately, their hopes produced no substantial result.

IV. The Restoration of the Tang Dynasty

When the Liang ruler employed ritual as a means of confirming the legitimacy of his regime, Li Cunxu also tried to claim legitimacy for his actions and status. Unlike his military-oriented father, Cunxu had much literary knowledge, and realized the importance of civil administration. After succeeding the power, he paid attention to civil and judicial administration, and successfully restored order to his people and soldiers,

46 Zhao Yan is the son of General Zhao Chou 趙曄 (824-889), and married with Zhu Wen's daughter. See *JWDS*, 14:195.

an achievement that had eluded his father.⁴⁷ Along with the expansion of his territory, Cunxu's status as a Tang local official was no longer congruent with his power. To fulfill his ambition to overthrow the Later Liang dynasty, Li needed to remold his image as a national leader. Thus, Cunxu decided to pronounce himself successor to the Tang dynasty and restore its political institutions. The process of preparing to assume the Tang throne started in 921, with his announcement that the imperial seal of former Tang rulers was now in his possession, miraculously rediscovered at Weizhou 魏州. Then, he started to erect a new central government by adopting Tang political institutions, while aggressively recruiting learned men as bureaucrats, preferably with credentials from the Tang period. The most of these recruits were former Tang civil servants of aristocratic pedigree. By recruiting the civil elite, Li tried to convince his own people and others of continuity in government, his Tang an extension of the former Tang.

After two years preparation, the process of rebuilding the Tang government under Li Cunxu was completed in the fourth month of 923, when Li performed accession rituals to become emperor of Tang.⁴⁸ The imperial title failed to bring any immediate advantage to Li. His war against the Liang had lasted more than a decade and reached a deadlock, causing great losses for both sides. In this war of attrition, the situation grew increasingly disadvantageous for Li Cunxu, because his limited landmass proved unable to sustain such a long-term effort. His position of disadvantage forced the new Tang emperor to risk a military venture. Intelligence from a defecting Liang general enabled Li to detect the locations of enemy troops. Thus, Li detoured the defensive line of the rival troops, leading his men directly against Bianliang, where troops defending Zhu Youzhen had been deflected to the border.⁴⁹

The bold action of Tang armies was completely beyond the expectation of the Liang authorities, while the Yellow River had blocked

47 *JWDS*, 27:366, 370; *ZZTJ*, 263:8572.

48 *JWDS*, 29:403.

49 *JWDS*, 10:151, 29:407-408; *ZZTJ*, 272:8893-8894.

their main forces from rescuing the capital. For lack of sound military judgment, Zhu Youzhen rejected the suggestion that he lead the palace guard to stand down Li Cunxu. Instead, he consulted Prime Minister Jing Xiang, who responded: “My wish is that Your Majesty avoid the enemy by leaving the capital, an idea that will surely go unheeded. My wish is that Your Majesty overcome the enemy through cunning strategy, but resolve will surely not come. 欲請陛下出居避狄，陛下必不聽從；欲請陛下出奇應敵，陛下必不果決。” At the end of the conversation, the emperor did nothing but face his subjects and weep loudly.⁵⁰ The evening before Tang troops approached the gates of Bianliang, the beleaguered Liang ruler ordered a general to behead him.⁵¹ Youzhen’s performance clearly reflected his confirmed civil proclivities, his ineptitude in military matters producing Li Cunxu’s sudden victory. At the news of their emperor’s death, the Later Liang generals and local governors nearly all surrendered to Li Cunxu, so he became the new ruler of northern China.

Li Cunxu’s military conquest of the Liang provided him power over land and armies, but an insufficient sense of legitimacy. To confirm his status, four months after capturing Bianliang, Li offered sacrifices to Heaven in Luoyang, completing the rites prepared but never actually conducted by Zhu Youzhen. By virtue of a grand ritual not held under the Tang emperor for five decades, Li tried to demonstrate a return to orthodox rule after a prolonged period of chaos dating to the rebellion of Huang Chao.⁵² He abolished the law codes of the Later Liang dynasty, reverting local place names to the Tang originals, in the case of recent change.⁵³ Officials from former Tang aristocratic families were appointed as top bureaucrats, expecting them to possess knowledge of former Tang administrative practices and institutions.⁵⁴ Besides the restoration of Tang political traditions, Li also imitated the image of previous Tang emperors.

50 *JWDS*, 10:151; 18:249.

51 *JWDS*, 10:151.

52 *JWDS*, 31:428.

53 *ZZTJ*, 272:8908.

54 *ZZTJ*, 272:8906-8907.

Although his Confucian knowledge was limited, for example, the new emperor liked to boast of his literary talents, such as his capacity to recite and write from memory passages from the most famous of Confucian classics: the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.⁵⁵

These efforts represent Li Cunxu's intent to win legitimacy by altering the military orientation of his regime. Managing rituals and restoring civil traditions enabled him to emphasize that he indeed followed the Confucian ideal of moral rule over violence. Envoys were delegated to the autonomous regimes to promote the merits and morality of the new Tang emperor. By augmenting the moral and military standing of Li Cunxu, Later Tang envoys tried to convince leaders of the southern kingdoms that an orthodox dynasty had been reestablished and the reunion of China was inevitable.⁵⁶ Apparently, Cunxu expected that the public relations gimmick to help him to extend his influence to an independent south, which the Later Tang could not yet control through war.

Li Cunxu's ambition enjoyed the support of his officials, especially his most trusted advisor and one-time retainer, Guo Chongtao 郭崇韜 (d. 926). In 923, Guo was appointed military secretary (*shumi shi* 樞密使), with authority to handle all affairs of state while commanding officials in and away from court.⁵⁷ He did not originate from aristocratic background and possessed limited literary knowledge, yet Guo believed that an orthodox regime should be dominated by civil aristocrats, as occurred at the previous Tang court. Wielding all-pervading powers, Guo strove to reestablish a bureaucracy led by literati with pedigree. Thus, when choosing officials for high level posts, family tradition became his preeminent concern. He consciously appointed learned men with civil pedigree, but blocked the promotion of officials through military feats

55 *JWDS*, 133:1752.

56 *JWDS*, 70:929-930.

57 *JWDS*, 57:766. For discussion of the power of military secretaries in the Later Tang, see Su Jilang 蘇基朗, "Wudai de shumi yuan 五代的樞密院," *Shihuo* (fukan) 食貨復刊, 10:1-2 (1980, Taipei), 5-8.

alone.⁵⁸ Because Guo tried to elevate civil power, he supported the emperor's plan to expand his territory by celebrating traditions of the Tang as a commonality across regions, rather than deploying armies.

The sudden collapse of the Later Liang did indeed terrify rulers in the south, causing most to dispatch envoys to Luoyang, the Later Tang capital, to win goodwill with the new emperor.⁵⁹ Through tributary exchanges and diplomatic dialogue, the leaders of southern kingdoms expected to collect information about the new Tang government, perhaps even adjust their own policies to thwart the further expansion of Li Cunxu. Not realizing the exact intention of such independent rulers, Li took the arrival of envoys as a sign of their submission to the Tang. With most parts of China now seeming to acquiesce in his sovereignty, Cunxu grew smug and arrogant to his sudden achievements, indifferent about further military expeditions.⁶⁰ The arrival of Gao Jixing 高季興 (858-928) seemed only to confirm his misunderstanding of matters.

Gao Jixing had been Zhu Wen's subordinate general for decades, appointed as governor of Jingnan 荊南 by the Liang court in 907 as reward for his loyalty and feats. After Zhu Wen died, Gao started to establish his independent authority, realigning with the Wu and Shu kingdoms. He later severed ties and restored the submission of taxes to the Later Liang court.⁶¹ At the end of the Liang, his fear of Li Cunxu's invasion caused Gao to pay a personal visit to Li's court late in the year 923 in demonstration of his ostensible submission. Being the first independent ruler to actually appear at the new court, Gao received generous treatment as reward for fealty.

58 *JWDS*, 57:766, 772; Wang Qinruo 王欽若, *Cefu yuangui*, 314:15.

59 *JWDS*, 132:1740, 133:1757, 1768, 134:1783, 1792.

60 In the second month of 924, a memorial of censor warned Li Cunxu that he should not be arrogant about his current power. Two months later, Xue Zhaowen 薛昭文(?), a court official, criticized the emperor's inaction in planning military expeditions. Through demonstrating his preparation on further military conquest, Xue argued, the emperor could terrify independent leaders, forcing them to surrender. See *Cefu yuangui*, 547:12-13.

61 Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Xing wudai shi* 新五代史 (punctuated edition, Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1985) [hereafter *XWDS*], 69:855-856; *JWDS*, 133:1751.

Court officials considered Gao's arrival provided an opportunity to consolidate central authority, so suggested that the emperor detain Gao in the capital and replace him at Jingnan with a court appointee. The proposal met with firm opposition from Guo Chongtao, as he argued to the emperor:

After the inheritance of the world, a succession of overlords from the four corners offer their congratulations, but are represented at court by sons, brothers, or subordinate commanders and their aides. Jixing alone has chosen to appear in person, so he is the only overlord lending respect to imperial sovereignty. In the absence of a reception of exceptional decorum by the court, we instead consider shackling him. In this way, how can you convince distant governors to come? Your Subjects are afraid that once this policy is executed, the world might disintegrate. 天下既定，四方諸侯雖相繼稱慶，然不過子弟與將吏耳，惟季興能躬自入覲，可謂尊獎王室者也。禮待不聞加等，反欲留縻之，何以來遠臣？恐此事一行，則天下解體矣。⁶²

As the first autonomous leader to voluntarily show for audience, Gao rightfully deserved to be released. Imprisoning him in the capital, Guo argued, would definitely undermine the credibility of the court and the moral reputation of the emperor, causing other independent leaders to reconsider their submission. Li wanted to demonstrate to Gao that he ruled by adhering to honesty, and so ordered his return home and continuation in power.⁶³ Apparently, Li and Guo expected that their generous treatment would solidify Gao's loyalty while setting an example for other autonomous leaders: as long as they submitted to the Tang, their current power and status could be retained.

After Gao returned to his own territory, unfortunately for the Tang court, he did not appreciate the symbolism behind the emperor's decision. His visit and personal observations revealed the shortcomings of Li Cunxu and his government. In the political sphere, the similarity between the former Tang dynasty and Li Cunxu's resuscitated Tang seemed at most superficial. Li Cunxu believed himself to be the orthodox successor to the

62 Tao Yue 陶岳, *Wudaishi bu*, 4:7

63 *JWDS*, 133:1751-1752; Tao Yue 陶岳, *Wudaishi bu*, 4:7; *ZZTJ*, 272:8910.

Tang line and was intent on imitating the emperors in every sphere. Content with his achievement of unity, Li came to imitate the luxurious palace life of previous Tang emperors. He also recruited thousands of eunuchs as a part of the Tang revival.⁶⁴ He began to construct new buildings for Luoyang as well, often at eunuch prodding, in spite of the dire financial conditions of his government.⁶⁵ The harem needed filling as well and eunuchs foraged local communities for prospective consorts and concubines, which soon rose to several thousand.⁶⁶ The new emperor's life came to be filled with music, drink, dance and sex, while affairs of state commonly got cast aside.

The Tang bureaucracy led by Guo Chongtao also lapsed into chaos. Lacking literary knowledge, Guo Chongtao was unable to distinguish genuine talents from mediocrities in literacy. The top-level officials were appointed for pedigree or family reputation rather than administrative talent, leaving most with little grasp of civil administration and political traditions. Rather than provide valuable advice, they acted instead as sycophants.⁶⁷ Without enough qualified bureaucrats, the Later Tang government was inefficient.⁶⁸ The expansion of eunuchs further hastened the decline of civil administration. Relying on imperial favor, eunuchs interfered with administration both in the central and local governments, which inspired struggles with civil bureaucrats, similar to events in the Tang court in the eighth and ninth centuries. At the recommendation of eunuchs, the emperor put most tribute from the governors into the Palace treasury (*neiku* 內庫) for personal expenses, seriously undermining the financing of

64 ZZTJ, 273:8912.

65 ZZTJ, 273:8934

66 ZZTJ, 273:8932.

67 For example, the prime ministers in Li Cunxu's reign, Doulu Ge 豆盧革(d. 927), Wei Yue 韋說(d. 927) and Lu Cheng 盧程(?), all lacked talent and scholarship. Their ineptitude and absurd behaviors are recorded in JWDS, 67:883-888.

68 For further discussion of Li Cunxu's government, see Mao Hanguang, "Wudai zhi zhengzhi yanxu yu zhengquan zhuan," 401-403.

government.⁶⁹ Although financial administrators levied heavy taxes on the common people, officials and soldiers still did not receive full salary. Soldiers and petty officers became the main victims of government bankruptcy, many barely able to survive.⁷⁰ Demoralization thus became widespread within civil and military quarters. Jealous of the power of Guo Chongtao, eunuchs fomented discord between the emperor and the bureaucratic leader, which significantly undermined their once close relations. Realizing the problems of the Tang authorities, Gao decided to ignore the orders from the Tang court and strengthen his own military forces to consolidate his autonomous power.⁷¹ Other leaders in the southern kingdoms chose the same policy as Gao, after their envoys returned and reported chaotic conditions prevailing under Li Cunxu's rule.⁷²

Realizing that propaganda about his morality and legitimacy would not sway autonomous leaders, the humiliated emperor switched to military force to complete the edifice of an orthodox dynasty. Guo Chongtao supported this change, because he needed military feats to encounter the expansion of eunuch power, which seriously threatened his power and status.⁷³ Li Cunxu's first target was the Shu Kingdom in Sichuan area. In the ninth month of 925, he appointed his son Li Jiji 李繼岌 (d. 926) as the command-in-chief of expeditionary troops and Guo as deputy. Under Guo's command, Tang armies quickly destroyed Shu defenses, and forced the Shu king to surrender.⁷⁴ After conquering Shu, Guo made additional efforts to expand the authority of the Later Tang. He delegated envoys southward to the Nanzhao 南詔 tribes to disseminate the august virtues of Tang dynasty,

69 *JWDS*, 57:766; *ZZTJ*, 273:8914.

70 *ZZTJ*, 274:8949-8950; *JWDS*, 73:965.

71 *ZZTJ*, 272:8910.

72 *JWDS*, 135:1808; *ZZTJ*, 272:8909; 273:8931.

73 *JWDS*, 57:768.

74 Later Tang troops needed only seventy-five days for their conquest of Sichuan. See *JWDS*, 33:460, 57:769.

aspiring to win their submission.⁷⁵ In his mind, the recovery of the golden age of the Tang dynasty was still attainable, and the primary approach to achieving that goal was political propaganda. Unfortunately, before fulfilling his ideal, Guo lost his life to eunuch rivals.

Because Guo Chongtao dominated all affairs pertaining to the expedition, a rift emerged between him and the prince Jiji, and the eunuchs around him took this opportunity to eliminate their rival. They were apparently behind rumors that the dictatorial Guo would threaten his life, and persuaded the terrified prince to assassinate Guo in the first month of 926.⁷⁶ The murder of Guo inspired a series of massacres, as the emperor decided to eliminate all relatives, friends and supporters of Guo. Soon, another high level military official, Zhu Youqian 朱友謙 (d. 926), the Governor of Hezhong 河中, died solely due to his friendship with Guo Chongtao. Hundreds of Zhu's relatives and subordinate generals were also beheaded.⁷⁷ Li's severe and unfair punishments produced anxious and angry emotions among generals and soldiers, so they tried to protect their own interests at the expense of central authority. Mutinies erupted throughout Hebei, and soon spread to other areas. In the second month of 926, the Tang emperor appointed senior general Li Siyuan 李嗣源 (867-933) as commander-in-chief to suppress the rash of uprisings, but Siyuan soon became the leader of the rebels. In a short period, uprisings grew beyond the court's ability to control, and even Palace Armies abandoned their loyalty. In the fourth month of 926, a group within the Palace Armies managed a coup, terminating Cunxu's life and his short-lived reign.

Soon after the death of the emperor, Li Siyuan entered the capital and enthroned himself. A man of non-Han ancestry with strong military credentials, he had spent most of his career in battle and lacked even the partial literacy in Chinese of his predecessor. He had a very limited appreciation of Tang tradition as well. While maintaining "Tang" as the designation of his regime, Li Siyuan had no intention of recovering Tang

⁷⁵ *XWDS*, 12:251.

⁷⁶ *ZZTJ*, 274:8952-8955.

⁷⁷ *ZZTJ*, 274:8956-8957.

traditions in the fashion of his predecessor.⁷⁸ In the beginning of his reign, his power faced the challenge of local mutinies, but Siyuan did not try to consolidate his power through civil enterprises: for example, he did not conduct sacrifices to Heaven until four years into his reign, unlike both Zhu Wen and Li Cunxu.⁷⁹ To reestablish peace in northern China, Siyuan carefully employed armies and imposed severe punishments to stop military uprisings.⁸⁰ His policies were efficient and peace quickly returned Later Tang territory. After that, Siyuan did not try to reunite all of China, but carefully managed his government in the north. Lacking literary knowledge, Siyuan had no intention of reestablishing a government under the domination of the civil elite.⁸¹ These facts reveal that Siyuan failed to follow the tradition of the previous Tang dynasty, and his conduct of some non-Han rituals only led to further divergence from orthodox practice.⁸² However, although Siyuan failed to decorate his reign with the outlook of orthodox dynasty, his reign lasted seven years, and the residents in northern China enjoyed comparatively peaceful conditions, which they had not seen since the Huang Chao Rebellion.⁸³ From the cultural perspective, on the other hand, Siyuan's indifference to orthodoxy was disadvantageous to the development of civil culture. Theoretically, the stable circumstances created by him might have indirectly advanced cultural development, but Siyuan paid little attention to this issue, which caused his government to

78 In the discussion of the designation of his regime, Li Siyuan revealed his unawareness of Tang tradition. He kept the name of Tang only because he desired to prolong the rule of Li Keyong family. *ZZTJ*, 275:8982-8983.

79 Li Siyuan offered sacrifice to the Heaven in the second month of 930, and he only managed this ritual once, see *JWDS*, 41:560; *XWDS*, 6:61.

80 For example, in the fifth month of 926, three thousand soldiers' families were beheaded at Bianliang, and eleven months later, another three thousand five hundred families were killed in Yedu 鄴都. See *ZZTJ*, 275:8986-8987, 9004.

81 Li Siyuan admitted to his son that he knew little about Confucian classics, see *BMSY*, 19:133-134; *XWDS*, 15:163.

82 *XWDS*, 6:58.

83 *XWDS*, 6:66.

contribute little to the civil field. Siyuan's policy formed the watershed of the Five Dynasties era. After his reign, later emperors' enthusiasm for pursuing orthodox tradition declined. After the end of Li Siyuan's reign, political volatility returned to northern China for almost three decades, as three dynastic transitions occurred.⁸⁴ When political leaders struggled to maintain their unstable regimes, they usually resorted to naked violence rather than legitimacy. It was not until the second half of the tenth century, after the establishment of the Later Zhou, that the effort to establish an orthodox dynasty recurred.⁸⁵

Conclusion

With the dynasty lasting only sixteen years, the efforts of Liang rulers to establish a political orthodoxy clearly had failed. Their endeavors at civil administration barely survived because Li Cunxu, upon succession, extensively purged the laws and institutions of this "bogus dynasty." This might be the reason why historians rarely pay attention to issues of legitimacy in the Later Liang. However, historians should not ignore the process of legitimation and its notable evolution under the regime of Zhu Wen. For reasons of legitimation, a military-oriented government gradually switched to the civil side, its political leaders increasingly embracing the Confucian value system. In that Zhu Wen needed to rely on literati to legitimize his power, the status and influence of the literati recovered. Surprisingly, a similar phenomenon appeared in Zhu's rival regime, the

84 Li Siyuan died in 933, and the Later Tang dynasty was replaced by the Later Jin in 936. The Later Jin was eliminated by the Khitan in the twelfth month of 946, and the Later Han was established in the second month of 947. In 950, a military coup ended the short-lived Later Han, creating the new dynasty, the Later Zhou.

85 Cheng-hua Fang, "Power Structures and Cultural Identities in Imperial China: Civil and Military Power from Late Tang to Early Song Dynasties (A.D. 875-1063)," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Providence: Brown University, 2001), 102-114, 158-169.

Later Tang government. The histories of the Later Liang and Later Tang offer illustrative examples in Chinese history where the former military elite tried to transform their military power into legitimate authority and remold their image from brave generals to ideal emperors; at that point, they needed to cooperate with literati and follow Confucian tradition. This was the reason why literati still possessed status, although lacking substantial power, in these governments, and also the reason why Confucian tradition partly survived during the chaos of the early tenth century.

Because the leaders of these two dynasties had contact with literary knowledge for only a short time, their understanding of civil tradition was superficial. They thus failed to realize the actual function of rituals and had unrealistic expectations of the power of rituals. Actually, the conduct of rites could not achieve what the troops failed to accomplish in battle. Thus, rites might make their regime possess the appearance of orthodox dynasties, but they failed to resolve the political dilemmas of each. While Zhu Wen spent time, energy and money managing civil affairs, his bellicose enemies continued to focus on military expansion. For this reason, the Liang emperor's emphasis on civil issues was harmful to the development of his regime. When Zhu Youzhen further shifted his government toward the civil, the problem became more grave. Zhu Wen's pursuit of legitimation provided his sons a chance to receive literary education, but the acculturation of Youzhen finally became a factor in the military collapse of the Later Liang. From this perspective, Zhu Wen's intention to build an orthodox dynasty before effectively controlling the whole of China sowed the seeds for the short life of his dynasty.

Like his longtime enemy Zhu Youzhen, Li Cunxu's short reign also resulted from his fixation on building an orthodox dynasty. As the flag of "Tang restoration" legitimized the expansion of their power, it was destined for Cunxu and his officials to follow the examples which their predecessors left. After eliminating the Later Liang, Li Cunxu thus stopped military expansion with the intent of imitating the life and image of previous Tang emperors; and Guo Chongtao tried to rebuild a government under the control of civil bureaucrats. Cunxu and Chongtao possessed only

limited literary knowledge, unfortunately, so their imitation of Tang tradition was only superficial. In the end, Cunxu grew addicted to palace amenities and ignored both officials and state affairs, while Chongtao accomplished nothing but duplicating the old conflict between bureaucrats and eunuchs. Both factors combined to produce the misfortune of their regime. Apparently, the ambitious military leaders attempted to expand their influence by claiming premature orthodoxy, but their pursuit of empty labels diverted them from the need for pragmatic approaches. Learning from the failure of Li Cunxu, Li Siyuan had little interest in the pursuit of legitimacy, but concentrated on maintaining efficient control within his established territory. This became the main reason that he produced peace in northern China for seven years.

The efforts of legitimation of the Later Liang and Later Tang emperors produced the initial acculturation of the military elite in the Five Dynasties era. This literary inclination might have improved the image of these emperors and helped the continuity of civil tradition, but it caused them to pay a high political price, the misfortune of their regimes. For this reason, the progress of acculturation in the tenth century was not smooth, as later emperors learned from the failure of Zhu Youzhen and Li Cunxu. The recovery of civil government was deferred until the second half of the tenth century.

(責任編輯：宋子玄 校對：吳立仁)

正統王朝的代價

後梁與後唐的政權合理化問題

方 震 華*

提 要

五代前期的後梁和後唐淵源於朱溫與李克用在唐末所建立的藩鎮政權，他們利用唐室衰微的時機，憑藉強大軍力不斷擴張，進而建立新的中央政府。依靠武力崛起的地方勢力在試圖轉變為中央政權時，其領導人勢必面臨合理化的問題，須解釋自己為何擁有「天命」而登基。後梁的朱溫希望透過禪讓與郊天儀式，證明自己是天命所歸；後唐的李存勖則以李唐王室的繼承人自居，宣稱唐室中興。不論採取何種方式，這些戎馬出身的領導人都必須要與文士合作，重視禮樂儀式，重建官僚體系。於是，他們原本全以軍事為中心的政權發生改變，也間接造成這些武人統治者的文儒化。

由於這些戎馬出身的統治者接觸文藝知識的時間甚短，對於儒學的理解有限，導致他們過度期待「正統」所能帶來的政治利益。從現實層面而言，儀式的進行須耗費大量金錢與人力，卻無助於政治和軍事問題的根本解決。當朱溫專注於禪讓儀式時，李克用父子得到重整旗鼓的機會；後梁末帝重視文治，卻缺乏統兵的能力，終為李存勖所滅。李存勖在滅梁後暫停軍事擴張，致力模仿唐代皇帝的形象，希望以唐室重建為宣傳，威服南方的獨立王國；執掌大權的郭崇韜則努力重建由世族領導的文人政府，而這兩點都成為其政權快速衰亡的原因。

李嗣源取代李存勖的王位，不再追求建立王朝的正統性，而致力於保境安民，這種重視現實的政策反而能達成較長的穩定與和平。這個轉變也成為五代歷史上的一个分水嶺。

關鍵詞：五代 後唐 後梁 合理化 正統 朱溫 李存勖 天命 官僚政府

* 國立臺灣大學歷史學系助理教授