Political legitimacy in Chinese history : the case of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-535)

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Chapter 2. The Contest for Legitimacy

From the fourth to sixth centuries, there was a "contest for legitimacy" between the Northern Wei and a series of southern Chinese dynasties (Eastern Jin, Liu Song, Southern Qi, and Liang).[1] Both sides, north and south, conducted complex legitimation practices to prove that they were the rightful rulers of the central realm. The kinds of practices these dynasties adopted and the manner in which they legitimized the Northern Wei or the Southern Dynasties will be examined in this chapter.

2.1 Establishing Legitimacy: The Northern Wei's Practices

The Northern Wei had to establish its legitimacy from scratch since this dynasty did not have any predecessor through which it could establish a valid dynastic lineage. This section focuses on how the Northern Wei established its legitimacy by following five significant methods: (1) by changing its name from Dai to Wei, (2) by choosing Water as its dynastic phase, (3) by transferring its capital from Pingcheng to Luoyang, (4) by adopting Chinese cultural conventions, and (5) by introducing diplomatic support.

2.1.1 Dynastic Name

As the present-day scholar Xu Jun 徐俊 indicates, Chinese dynasties named themselves according to the following conventions.[2] The first and most popular convention was to derive the dynastic title from a place name. Some dynasties (such as the Shang, Zhou, and Qin) derived their names from the location in which the ruling family originated.[3] Other dynasties (such as the regional kingdoms in the Sixteen Kingdoms and the Ten Kingdoms period during the fourth and tenth centuries respectively) took their names from the areas over which they ruled.[4] Several

[1] The Northern Wei collapsed a few decades before the Chen Dynasty was established. Thus the Chen Dynasty is not studied in this chapter, even though it had competed with the northern dynasties for legitimacy.
[2] Xu Jun 徐俊, *Zhongguo gudai wangchao he zhengquan minghao Tanyuan* 中國古代王朝和政權名號探源 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2000), 15-17.
[3] Ibid., 43-57.
[4] Ibid., 92-15, 227-242.

dynasties (such as the Western Han, Cao Wei, and Western Jin dynasties) were named after the fief name of their founding monarchs.[5] The second convention was to borrow the name of another dynasty. Many dynasties, such as the Eastern Han, the Eastern Jin, and the Southern Song, had family ties with the rulers of earlier dynasties and thus adopted their names. Because these successors generally had different capital cities or territories, later scholars added directional adjectives to distinguish these otherwise identically-named dynasties.[6] A few dynasties (such as the Yuan, Ming, and Qing) did not follow either of these two conventions. The Yuan, for instance, took its name from the *Yijing* 易經 (also known as *I Ching*), the famous traditional Chinese book of divination.[7] So how about the Northern Wei? Which of the above conventions, if any, did it follow?

It is generally accepted that the Northern Wei dynasty was established in the first month of 386, according to the lunar calendar. In that month, Tuoba Gui re-established the Kingdom of Dai and ascended the throne as King of Dai.[8] Both the kingdom and title were legacies of his ancestors, with the lineage traced back to Tuoba Yilu. As mentioned previously, the Western Jin had enfeoffed Tuoba Yilu with the Dai area and conferred upon him the title of king in 315. The Kingdom of Dai thereupon acted nominally as a vassal state of the Western Jin, and most of the Tuoba leaders initiated their reigns by being enthroned as King of Dai. Tuoba Gui also followed this convention and succeeded as King of Dai in 386.

In May of the same year, Tuoba Gui changed his title to King of Wei 魏王 and retained Dai as the name of his dynasty, though his reason for doing so is not

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[5] Ibid.,58, 78, 87.

[6] Ibid., 71-74, 89-91, 250. Some similarly named dynasties did not share familial ties and later scholars added different adjectives to distinguish between previous and later ones. These adjectives could be the monarch's surname, such as the Cao Wei, Liu Song, and Wu Zhou 武周 (690-705), or temporal adjectives, such as the Former Qin 前秦 (350-394), Later Jin 後晉 (936-947), and Later Han 後漢 (947-951) dynasties. See Xu Jun, *Zhongguo Gudai*, 78-79, 142-143, 180-182.

[7] Ibid., 294-259, 298-299, 308-313. The Yuan Dynasty took its name *yuan* 元 (the Primal) from the *I Ching*. The names of the Ming and Qing are more difficult to determine. According to Hok-Lam Chan, the name of *ming* has two origins: the dynastic phase of the Song Dynasty, Fire (which has a similar meaning to *ming*), and the royal title of king of Ming, which was adopted by two anti-Mongol warlord states that preceded the Ming. See Hok-Lam Chan, "The 'Song' Dynasty Legacy: Symbolism and Legitimation from Han Liner to Zhu Yuanzhang of the Ming Dynasty," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 68.1(2008): 91-133. The dynastic name Qing derives from the Five Dynastic Phases theory and some other factors. See Ye Hong 葉紅 and Hu Axiang 胡阿祥, "Daqing guohao shulun 大清國號述論," *Zhongguo lishi dili luncong* 中國歷史地理論叢 4 (2000): 65-77.

[8] Although this state was referred to as Dai at that time, people still tend to refer to it as Northern Wei since Tuoba Gui changed the dynastic name to Wei, as is mentioned above and again in subsequent paragraphs.

recorded.[9] The name "Wei" refers primarily to a region in the central Yellow River basin. This name was first used by the Kingdom of Wei 魏國 (403-225 BCE) in the Warring States period.[10] In the Three Kingdoms Period, the Cao Wei Dynasty named itself "Wei" because its founder, Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220), possessed the title of King of Wei as well as the fief of the Wei region.[11] There is, however, no obvious connection between Tuoba Gui and either of the previous two dynasties called Wei, and the reasoning behind his adoption of Wei as the title of his kingship remains a mystery.

The reason for keeping Dai as the name of his dynasty is also unclear. One possible reason is that Tuoba Gui maintained this name to resist pressure from the Later Yan Dynasty. Established in 384, the Later Yan defined itself as the successor of the Former Yan 前燕 (337-370), a Xianbei dynasty that originally served as a vassal of the Western Jin.[12] In 386, the king of the Later Yan, Murong Chui 慕容垂 (326-396), declared himself Emperor (*huangdi* 皇帝) and Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子), the two most supreme titles in the traditional Chinese political context.[13] The doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven, as mentioned in the introduction, argues that the legitimate ruler, or Son of Heaven, possessed an exclusive mandate from Heaven, which entitled him to rule over All Under Heaven.[14] Ever since the First Emperor of China 秦始皇帝 (r. 221-210 BCE) introduced the title of "emperor," this title continued to denote that the holder of the title possessed the Mandate of Heaven.[15] Emperor was the title from which all other titles, such as King (*wang* 王) or Duke (*gong* 公), derived their legitimacy. In the case of the Later Yan, by declaring himself emperor, Murong Chui demonstrated his wish to be the supreme legitimate ruler of China. He attempted to demonstrate his supreme position by conferring several (inferior) noble titles upon Tuoba Gui, who resolutely rejected them.[16] Two years later, in a meeting with an envoy of Dai, Murong Chui criticized Tuoba Gui for not accepting the titles. The envoy defended his sovereign by pointing out that both the Later Yan and Dai derived

[9] *WS*, 2.20.
[10] Xu Jun, *Zhongguo Gudai*, 79.
[11] *SGZ*, 1.47.
[12] Holcombe, "The Xianbei in Chinese History," 10-15.
[13] *WS*, 2.21.
[14] Ibid., 95. 2041.
[15] Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), 6.236.
[16] *WS*, 2.21. The noble titles were King of Shanggu 上谷王 and Western Chanyu 西單於.

their legitimacy from the Western Jin, indicating that both states possessed the same status.[17] Hence, it is possible that retaining the dynastic name of Dai could have been necessary for Tuoba Gui to counterbalance pressure from the Later Yan. In other words, if Tuoba Gui changed the name of his state to Wei, he would break the link with the Western Jin upon which his legitimacy was based.

In 398, "Wei" was finally settled upon as the dynastic name. As He Dezhang points out, this change was possibly triggered by a diplomatic dispute that happened in May of that year when the Later Qin invaded Xiangyang 襄陽 in Eastern Jin territory.[18] A general from Xiangyang sent a letter to a nearby Tuoba general, Tuoba Zun 拓跋遵 (?-407), requesting help. Since the Eastern Jin identified themselves as the successors of the Western Jin, which had endorsed the legitimacy of Dai, the Eastern Jin general did not address Tuoba Gui as King of Dai (or Wei) or use any other honorifics in the letter. Rather, he referred to Tuoba Gui merely as "your reverent brother" (*xian xiong* 賢兄), given that Tuoba Gui was the brother of the general, Tuoba Zun.[19] The *Weishu* records that this infuriated Tuoba Gui, who ordered his official, Cui Cheng 崔逞, to deliver a retort.[20] This did not go well; Cui Cheng called the Eastern Jin ruler "your honored master" (*gui zhu* 貴主), in which "your" referred to the general in Xiangyang. This also infuriated Tuoba Gui, according to the *Weishu*, since he believed that the word "master" suggested that Cui Cheng, his own envoy, viewed the Eastern Jin ruler as legitimate. Cui Cheng was thereupon sentenced to death.[21]

This incident clearly indicates that Tuoba Gui did not see himself as a mere subject of the Eastern Jin. Rather, he was eager to find means by which to demonstrate that his status was equal or even superior to that of the Eastern Jin. Some months later, on July 15, Tuoba Gui gathered officials to discuss his dynasty's name.[22] Most of his officials pointed out that a dynasty's name should derive from either the place from which they ruled or from which their monarchs had originated. Since the Tuoba people had long occupied the Dai area, it was decided that it was best

[17] Ibid., 15.370.
[18] He Dezhang, "Beiwei Guohao," 115.
[19] *WS*, 32.758.
[20] Early in 321, the newly established Eastern Jin conferred the new official title on the Tuoba ruler, Tuoba Yulü 拓跋鬱律 (?-321). However, Tuoba Yulü rejected this conferral, indicating that he considered the Eastern Jin to be illegitimate. *WS*, 1.9.
[21] Ibid., 32.758.
[22] Ibid., 2.32.

to use it as the name of their dynasty.[23] However, Cui Xuanbo 崔玄伯 (?-418), a confidant of Tuoba Gui, supported the new name of "Wei."[24] He argued:

> Although our state has long unified these vast and bare northern lands, it is only you [Tuoba Gui], our majesty, who answered your calling and soared like a dragon. Although our state is old, you have recently received the Mandate of Heaven. Therefore, at the beginning of the Dengguo 登國 reign period (386-396), you proclaimed yourself King of Wei. Moreover, [a few years later] Murong Yong [the ruler of Western Yan 西燕, 384-394] also enfeoffed you with the area of Wei. Now, this "Wei" is a great name. It was the name of a great state [the Cao Wei Dynasty] in the Divine Land [i.e. the central realm] […] I, therefore, consider it appropriate to rename our state "Wei."
> 國家雖統北方廣漠之土，逮于陛下，應運龍飛。雖曰舊邦，受命惟新。是以登國之初，改代曰魏。又慕容永亦奉魏土。夫魏者大名，神州之上國…臣愚以為宜號為魏。[25]

Cui Xuanbo highlighted the importance of Tuoba Gui, whom, he argued, had initiated a new period for the Tuoba state. After Tuoba Gui was enthroned, he had been granted the fief of Wei and received the title of King of Wei, which echoed his possession of the Mandate of Heaven. To that end, in addition to being the name of a well-known Chinese dynasty, "Wei" was now a much more appropriate name than "Dai."

According to the *Weishu*, Tuoba Gui agreed with Cui Xuanbo and soon issued an edict changing the dynastic name. In this edict, Tuoba Gui declared that "Dai" referred to his ancestors' state, which had long dominated the northern frontier area of China but failed to rule the central realm. However, when he ascended the throne, the central realm was in turmoil without a rightful ruler. He hence led his troops to defeat the rebels and bring peace to the central realm. Tuoba Gui concluded the edict by saying that his state should therefore be renamed "Wei."[26] It is clear that Tuoba Gui

[23] Ibid., 2.32-33.
[24] He Dezhang, "Beiwei Guohao," 116-118.
[25] *WS*, 24. 620-21.
[26] Ibid., 2.32-33.

introduced the new dynastic name of "Wei" in order to proclaim himself the new rightful ruler of the central realm.

There were significant underlying concerns in this discussion about the proper name of the Northern Wei. In accordance with the two aforementioned conventions concerning dynastic names in Chinese history, "Dai" would be the proper name, because it derives from the birthplace of the Tuoba people and had been used by them for many decades. However, this name had a remarkable shortcoming in that, by being endorsed by the Western Jin, it still contained the implication of the Tuoba regime had started as a vassal. After Tuoba Gui occupied northern China and strove to have his state acknowledged as more traditionally Chinese than the Eastern Jin (the alleged successor of the Western Jin), "Dai" was no longer an appropriate name. He had to discard any name that reminded of his earlier vassalage to the Western Jin. The new name of "Wei" would accomplish this and manifest his dynasty's legitimacy.

"Wei" was thus a suitable alternative for Tuoba Gui. On the one hand, this name indirectly challenged the legitimacy of the Jin Dynasty, that is, both the Eastern Jin and its predecessor, the Western Jin. In 266, Sima Yan 司馬炎 (r. 266-290) had usurped the throne from the last ruler of the Cao Wei Dynasty and established the Western Jin Dynasty.[27] In this respect, "Wei" was morally superior to "Jin." On the other hand, Tuoba Gui's realm had a firm right to adopt "Wei" as the new dynastic name. As Cui Xuanbo had argued, Tuoba Gui already held the fief of Wei and the title King of Wei. After Tuoba Gui occupied the Northern China Plain (the territory formerly occupied by the Cao Wei Dynasty), he then had a practical reason to rename his state "Wei." Supported by the historical criterion of legitimacy as mentioned in the introduction, the name of "Wei" indicated a direct historical link between the Cao Wei and the Northern Wei Dynasty, which directly supported the Northern Wei's claim to legitimacy.[28]

2.1.2 Dynastic Phase

The adoption of a dynastic phase was one of the most remarkable means by which Chinese dynasties legitimated their rule. Two major conventions existed regarding its selection. The prevailing one derived from Liu Xin's Five Phases generation theory. As mentioned in the introduction, in terms of this theory, once a new dynasty replaces

[27] *JS*, 3.50.
[28] He Dezhang provides more evidence. See He Dezhang, "Beiwei Guohao," 113-125.

an old one, its phase is automatically generated by that of its predecessor.[29] Many Chinese dynasties, such as most of the Southern Dynasties, followed this convention. For instance, the Eastern Jin's dynastic phase was Metal, which generated the Water Phase. Therefore, once the Liu Song Dynasty replaced the Eastern Jin, it established Water as its dynastic phase.[30] Another convention was for ruling houses to adopt the dynastic phase from an earlier dynasty that they saw as their predecessors. Dynasties such as the Eastern Han, Eastern Jin, Liang, and Southern Song had family ties with earlier dynasties and hence maintained the old dynastic phase so as to indicate that they had inherited their ancestors' legitimacy. For example, the Eastern Jin declared itself the successor of the Western Jin and thus proclaimed the phase of its predecessor, Metal, to be its own dynastic phase. Which of these conventions did the Northern Wei follow?

After defeating the Later Yan, Tuoba Gui introduced various ways to strengthen his reign: changing the name of his dynasty to Wei, setting Pingcheng as the new capital, improving the legal and administrative system, calendar and official ritual system, and adopting the title of emperor.[31] On the day that he declared himself Emperor and the Son of Heaven, on January 24, 399, he gathered his officials to discuss the dynastic phase of the Northern Wei. Cui Xuanbo suggested the Earth Phase.[32] He purportedly offered three justifications for the appropriateness of the Earth Phase.[33] Firstly, he pointed out that the Yellow Emperor was the ancestor of the Tuoba people, and, according to legend, the Yellow Emperor had adopted the Earth Phase for his state.[34] Hence, in Cui Xuanbo's view, the Northern Wei should adopt

[29] For study of the dynastic phases in the Han Dynasty, see Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han*, 133-155.
[30] *SS*, 2.48. Most of the Southern Dynasties followed this convention. For instance, after toppling the Liu Song Dynasty, the Southern Qi Dynasty proclaimed Wood to be its dynastic phase (because Water generates Wood). The Chen Dynasty replaced the Liang Dynasty and adopted the Fire phase (because Wood, which is the dynastic phase of the Liang Dynasty, generates Fire). Since the Liang Dynasty shared the same ruling house as the Southern Qi, this dynasty also adopted the dynastic phase of Wood.
[31] *WS*, 2.33, 2. 34.
[32] Ibid. Cui Xuanbo also suggested that the Northern Wei should adopt the official color (yellow), and number (five). The dynastic phases allegedly had corresponding colors and numbers. For relevant discussions, see Needham, *Science and Civilization*, 232-253.
[33] *WS*, 108.2734. Cui Xuanbo did not apply the prevailing Five Phases generation theory in his argument. Some reasons for this will be provided in the following paragraph.
[34] The Yellow Emperor had been described as the ancestor of various non-Chinese people for various reasons. See Marc Andre Matten, "Zuowei minzu rentong fuhao de Huangdi, bei chuangzao de chuantong 作為民族認同符號的黃帝,被創造的傳統?" in *Qingdai zhengzhi yu guojia rentong* 清代政治與國家認同, eds. Liu Fengyun 劉鳳雲 and others (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), 76-110.

the same phase.[35] Secondly, in a Tuoba legend an auspicious monster described as resembling a bull had guided their ancestors across the forest during their second migration. Cui Xuanbo pointed out that the animal that corresponded to the Earth Phase was the bull, and hence that the Northern Wei should adopt this phase. Thirdly, during the second half of 396, a dazzling yellow star (supernova) had sparkled twice in the night.[36] Cui Xuanbo insisted that this celestial portent predicted the emergence of a new and true emperor, Tuoba Gui. In his view, the Northern Wei should adopt the dynastic phase of Earth, for it corresponded with the yellow color of the star. Tuoba Gui agreed with Cui Xuanbo and declared the assumption of the Earth Phase.

Why did Cui Xuanbo introduce these uncommon reasons to suggest an appropriate dynastic phase, rather than resorting to the prevailing Five Phases generation theory? There are two possible reasons. First and foremost, the Northern Wei did not have the qualification to adopt the Five Phases theory. As mentioned above, in terms of the Five Phases generation theory, the five phases are transferred in a continuous sequence from the previous dynasty to its successor. Once a new dynasty replaced the old, the old dynastic phase ended and automatically generated the dynastic phase of the new dynasty. That being the case, the Northern Wei had defeated the Later Yan, a short-lived dynasty that did not have a recorded dynastic phase. At the time, only the Eastern Jin was associated with a dynastic phase, namely Metal. The Northern Wei did not replace or conquer the Eastern Jin and thus failed to receive a rightful dynastic phase. Secondly, the Cao Wei Dynasty had also adopted the Earth Phase. It is highly possible, as He Dezhang suggests, that Cui Xuanbo proposed sharing the same dynastic phase with the Cao Wei Dynasty in order to suggest a direct historical link between the Cao Wei and the Northern Wei, even though the two ruling houses were not related by blood.[37]

The Northern Wei maintained the Earth Phase for a century after Cui Xuanbo's proposal was accepted. However, in 490, Emperor Xiaowen issued an edict ordering his officials to gather to discuss a new dynastic phase. The edict declared that the Earth Phase was not appropriate since it was not in accordance with the Five Phases

[35] Needless to say, to us the Yellow Emperor is a legendary ruler, and the Five Phases theory postdates his supposed reign period by more than two millennia, but Cui Xuanbo was seemingly unaware of this.
[36] *WS*, 153.2389.
[37] He Dezhang, "Beiwei Guohao," 118.

generation theory. In the edict he continued by asking his officials to reconsider their dynasty's dynastic phase.[38]

The crucial criterion when applying the Five Phases generation theory, as mentioned above, was to be able to identify a legitimate predecessor whose dynastic phase would have automatically generated that of the Northern Wei's phase. In 490, officials overcame that difficulty and, adopting the Five Phases generation theory, proposed two distinct dynastic phases to Emperor Xiaowen.

Gao Lü 高閭 (?-502) insisted on the Earth Phase but offered an explanation that was different from that of Cui Xuanbo. First, Gao Lü argued that earlier northern "barbarian" states (of the so-called Sixteen Kingdom Period) could be considered rightful predecessors of the Northern Wei. He stressed that a state could acquire legitimacy as well as a rightful dynastic phase once it occupied parts of the central realm.[39] As Gao Lü mentioned, since these northern "barbarian" states, such as the Later Zhao 後趙 (319-352), the Former Yan 前燕 (337- 370) and the Former Qin, had indeed occupied the central realm, their dynastic phases could generate suitable ones for the Northern Wei. Next, Gao Lü provided the following sequence: Western Jin, Metal → Later Zhao, Water → Former Yan, Wood → Former Qin, Fire.[40] Gao Lü argued that the Northern Wei was established shortly after the Former Qin collapsed. Although the Northern Wei did not replace the Former Qin directly, the Former Qin could still be viewed as its predecessor and hence the Fire Phase of the Former Qin generated the Earth Phase of the Northern Wei.[41]

Li Biao 李彪 (440-501) and Cui Guang 崔光 (449-552) insisted on the Water Phase instead. They pointed out that all of the "barbarian" states mentioned by Gao Lü were illegitimate due to their brutal and short-lived reigns. Both officials argued that only the possession of the Mandate of Heaven made a dynasty legitimate. They stressed that the Tuoba tribe had maintained a friendly relationship with the Western Jin and was awarded the Kingdom of Dai for their support. When the Western Jin fell into disorder, the Mandate of Heaven automatically transferred to the next virtuous candidate, the Kingdom of Dai – or so they argued. Li Biao and Cui Guang described a sequence of events in which the Western Jin gave way to the Northern Wei, making

[38] *WS*, 181.2744.
[39] Ibid., 181. 2744-45.
[40] See Luo Xin, "Shiliuguo Beichao," 47-56.
[41] *WS*, 181.2744-45.

the Metal Phase of the Western Jin generate the Water Phase of the Northern Wei.[42] In other words, these two officials argued that the Western Jin could still act as the rightful predecessors of the Tuoba Wei, even though that dynasty had perished long ago, and several kingdoms had come in between.

There are some similarities between the proposals by Gao Lü on the one hand, and Li Biao and Cui Guang on the other. For instance, all three saw the Western Jin Dynasty as a legitimate predecessor and denounced the Eastern Jin as illegitimate. They also cited Liu Xin's Five Phases generation theory in their discussions. However, they still arrived at different conclusions, indicating their dissimilar understandings of legitimacy. Gao Lü argued for the Earth Phase since he regarded the northern "barbarian" kingdoms as the legitimate predecessors of the Northern Wei. For him, the occupation of the central realm (which corresponds to the geographical criterion of legitimacy that was identified in the introduction to this dissertation) was a significant source of legitimacy. Li Biao and Cui Guang supported the Water Phase because they saw the possession of the Mandate of Heaven as the main source of legitimacy. In their view, the mandate transferred from the Western Jin to the Kingdom of Dai and hence to the subsequent Northern Wei, making the Western Jin the rightful providers of the Northern Wei's dynastic phase.

Emperor Xiaowen proved to be an ambitious ruler. He not only introduced Chinese practices to replace Tuoba customs, but also strove to conquer the Southern Qi and unify the central realm. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that Emperor Xiaowen favored the latter conception. Supported by the historical criterion of legitimacy identified in the introduction, the Water Phase could highlight a historical link between the Western Jin – a well-acknowledged Chinese dynasty that had ruled over the entire central realm – and the Northern Wei, and thereby legitimate his dynasty. In February of 491, Emperor Xiaowen issued an edict changing the dynastic phase, saying the Water Phase was more appropriate than the Earth Phase.[43] Most subsequent dynasties, such as the Sui, Tang, and Song Dynasty, acknowledged the Water Phase of the Northern Wei and derived their own dynastic phase from it.[44]

[42] Ibid., 181.2746.
[43] *WS*, 181. 2746-47.
[44] Liu Pujiang, "Nanbeichao de Yichan," 127-152.

2.1.3 Capital City

Chinese monarchs took into account many factors when selecting their capitals. Ordinarily speaking, a city with outstanding objective advantages – such as superior agricultural yield, advantageous defensive positions, and good infrastructure – increased its chances of being chosen as the capital.[45] Alternatively, a city that had served as a capital before could also be chosen as the capital of later dynasties. Following the historical criterion of legitimacy outlined in the introduction, a dynasty could "borrow legitimacy" from its predecessor by sharing the same capital. The Northern Wei followed that tradition to determine their capital city. The following discussion examines how this dynasty improved its legitimacy by establishing the prominent Chinese city of Luoyang as its capital.[46]

The capital of the Kingdom of Dai was Shengle, a small city located in the center of the Yin mountain area. When Tuoba Gui revived the Kingdom of Dai in 386, he kept Shengle as the capital.[47] However, when he renamed his state Wei in 398, he transferred the capital city to Pingcheng, a northern frontier city of many Chinese dynasties.[48] The main reason for this change, as Li Pin points out, was the advantages that Pingcheng offered.[49] Shengle was a relatively new city that, as archaeological discoveries reveal, lacked many urban facilities.[50] Pingcheng, on the other hand, had a better infrastructure and a solid food supply, in addition to being located closer to the North China Plain that the Tuoba had recently begun to dominate.

Pingcheng remained the capital for the next century, until 493 when Emperor Xiaowen declared Luoyang the rightful capital and moved there. The reasons for this are as follows.

During the reign of Emperor Xiaowen, the Northern Wei gained superiority over their neighbors. In the north, the Northern Wei had greatly weakened the ruling power

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[45] For further studies see Ye Xiaojun 葉驍軍, *Zhongguo ducheng fazhan shi* 中國都城發展史 (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1988), 13-15; Zhou Zhenhe 周振鶴, "Dongxi paihuai yu nanbei wangfu, Zhongguo lishi shang wuda ducheng dingwei de zhengzhi dili yinsu 東西徘徊與南北往復-中國歷史上五大都城定位的政治地理因素," *Huadong shifan daxue xuebao* 華東師範大學學報 41.1(2009): 32-39.

[46] For a recent study on this issue, see Dai Yulin 戴雨林, "Beiwei Xiaowendi qiandu Luoyang wenti yanjiu zongshu 北魏孝文帝遷都洛陽問題研究綜述," *Luoyang daxue xuebao* 洛陽大學學報 1 (2005): 96-99.

[47] *WS*, 2.20

[48] Ibid., 2.33.

[49] Li Ping, *Beiwei Pingcheng*, 289-302.

[50] Su Bai 宿白, "Shengle Pingcheng yidai de Tuoba Xianbei 盛樂平城一帶的拓跋鮮卑," *Wenwu* 11(1977): 38-46.

of the steppe, the Rouran state, and finally subjugated it in 478.[51] Meanwhile, the Northern Wei gradually extended their dominance over the south, suppressing the Liu Song and Southern Qi south of the Huai River 淮河. The Southern Dynasties, meanwhile, fell into a cycle of endless usurpations and infighting, which greatly weakened their power. The Northern Wei then had the opportunity to become a fully-fledged Chinese-style dynasty located on Chinese soil.

When Emperor Xiaowen assumed the reins of the Northern Wei in 490, his priority was to enhance his authority. One of the methods he used, as He Dezhang points out, was to rebuild Pingcheng into a more magnificent Chinese-style capital.[52] Historical records show that Pingcheng was previously a rudimentary capital with very basic and simple buildings.[53] On Emperor Xiaowen's order, magnificent buildings akin to those of most Chinese dynasties were constructed. These included a Bright Hall (*mingtang* 明堂; supposedly the most glorious palace for ancient Chinese dynasties),[54] two different kinds of temples (one for Confucius, the other for the Tuoba's ancestors), and a new central palace, *taijdian* 太極殿.[55]

However, Pingcheng seemingly failed to be a suitable capital for the Northern Wei. The drawbacks of this capital were manifest. First, as more and more immigrants came to Pingcheng, this city suffered increasing food shortages, as Wang Zhongluo points out.[56] Since Pingcheng was located outside the main agricultural area, the North China Plain, historical records note that the Northern Wei had to import a massive amount of crops from that area to Pingcheng.[57] Secondly, as the headquarters of the Tuoba culture, the elites living in Pingcheng did not welcome the Chinese culture that Emperor Xiaowen was so fond of. He Dezhang explains that Emperor Xiaowen had to suspend his Sinophile policies in 491 due to fierce resistance from the

[51] *WS*, 103.2296.
[52] Emperor Xiaowen had ascended the throne in 471, when he was 4 years old. His grandmother Dowager Wenming actually possessed the real power until 490, when Emperor Xiaowen assumed rulership of the Northern Wei.
[53] *NQS*, 57.984.
[54] For the Northern Wei's Bright Hall, see Katherine R. Tsiang, "Changing Patterns of Divinity and Reform in the Late Northern Wei," *The Art Bulletin* 84 (2002): 230.
[55] *WS*, 7.161.
[56] Wang Zhongluo, *Wei Jin nanbeichao shi*, 538. Also see *WS*, 110.2856.
[57] Ibid, 15.380.

Tuoba aristocracy in Pingcheng.[58] Frustrated by that failure, Emperor Xiaowen reportedly told a confidant in private:

> Our clan rose up from the north and then moved to Pingcheng. […] This area was suitable for operating a military campaign, not for civilized administration. It truly is a difficult task to change our (Tuoba) habits and customs here.
> 國家興自北土，徙居平城…此間用武之地，非可文治。移風易俗，信為甚難。[59]

Emperor Xiaowen consequently decided to transfer the capital. The first option was Yecheng 鄴城. In the Warring States period, this city had been expanded and had served as the secondary capital of the Kingdom of Wei. During the Han Dynasty, it had remained a regional capital. After the Han Dynasty collapsed, Yecheng began to stand out. Cao Cao selected this city as his major base, and his Cao Wei Dynasty established it as a secondary capital. Thereafter, both the Later Zhao and Former Yan chose Yecheng as their capital and continued to reinforce it, making it the most magnificent city in northern China. In fact, the Northern Wei had already twice considered making Yecheng its capital due to its beneficial conditions, such as a huge agricultural yield and advantageous defensive conditions.[60] Although these two attempts failed for various reasons, they demonstrate that Yecheng was considered an optimal alternative capital for the Northern Wei.

However, Emperor Xiaowen directly expressed his dislike of Yecheng.[61] He argued that two previous "barbarian" dynasties (the Later Zhao and Former Yan) that had established this city as their capital had been short-lived, making Yecheng an ominous capital. He refused to share a capital with those two "barbarian" dynasties, even if Yecheng possessed the most advantageous conditions.

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[58] He Dezhang, "Lun Beiwei Xiaowendi qiandu shijian 論北魏孝文帝遷都事件," *Wei Jin Nanbeichao Suitangshi ziliao* 魏晉南北朝隋唐史資料 7(1997): 72-83.
[59] *WS*, 19.464.
[60] Early in February 398, Tuoba Gui had planned to make Yecheng his capital. This plan failed since the northern steppe power, the Rouran and the Tiele, were the most serious enemies of the Northern Wei at that time. In 415, the Northern Wei officials considered transferring the capital to Yecheng again because Pingcheng suffered a serious drought and famine. This attempt also failed since Cui Hao 崔浩 (?-450), the son of Cui Xuanbo, convinced Emperor Mingyuan 明元帝 (r.409-423) that Pingcheng was a better strategic location in comparison with Yecheng. See *WS*, 2.31, 35.808.
[61] Le Shi 樂史, *Taiping yuanyu ji* 太平寰宇記 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007), 55.1134.

Luoyang was another option. This city had been in ruins since 311, when rebels had burned down this capital of the Western Jin.[62] Still, compared to other Chinese cities, Luoyang was a superior source of legitimacy. This was due, firstly, to the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven. Located in a fertile basin and surrounded by the Yellow River and the Luo River 洛河, this city had supposedly been built by the Duke of Zhou 周公 (in around the 11th century BCE) and served as a capital for the Western Zhou Dynasty 西周 (1046 BCE - 771 BCE). As archaeological discoveries reveal, the Western Zhou rulers described Luoyang as the center of "All Under Heaven" and they coined the word *zhongguo* 中國, or the central realm, to denote this city and its environs.[63] Although "the central realm" gradually came to be understood as denoting the geographical area now known as China, Luoyang was often viewed as the center of the central realm.[64] Thus establishing Luoyang as the capital could symbolize dominance over the central realm to some extent.[65] On the other hand, Luoyang had a long history of being a capital city, which imbued it with the rich potency of legitimacy, as Chen Yinque points out.[66] The Eastern Zhou had previously established this city as its capital.[67] A series of later dynasties – from the Eastern Han, the Cao Wei, to the Western Jin – all chose Luoyang as their capital.[68] In short, even though it was in ruins, Luoyang was seen as the symbolic center of the central realm, and it had been the capital of various earlier Chinese dynasties, making it an ideal choice for a dynasty eager to be seen as legitimate.

Secondly, Emperor Xiaowen liked the Luoyang option because, as the *Weishu* records, he once told a confidant: "Mountain Xiao and Hangu Pass [mountain and pass near Luoyang] are imperial residences, the Yellow River and the Luo River are royal quarters. I will thus operate a big movement and gloriously reside in the central realm" 崤函帝宅, 河洛王里, 因茲大舉, 光宅中原.[69] To achieve this goal without alerting staunch objectors in Pingcheng, Emperor Xiaowen allegedly has recourse to a

[62] *JS*, 5.121-122
[63] Li Liu and Xingcan Chen, *The Archaeology of China: From the Late Paleolithic to the Early Bronze Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 397.
[64] Chen Yinque, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao*, 234.
[65] For more detailed studies, see Li Dalong, "The Central Kingdom," 323-352.
[66] Chen Yinque, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao*, 174.
[67] Ye Xiaojun, *Zhongguo Ducheng*, 52-60.
[68] In fact, the Eastern Jin had planned to move its capital to Luoyang twice in order to promote this city's legitimacy. For a detailed study, see 2.3.3.
[69] *WS*, 19. 464-65. *Zhongyuan* 中原 is a synonym for *zhongguo*, the central realm, in an early Chinese context.

ruse. He announced a plan to conquer the Southern Qi in 493 since the ruler of that dynasty had died in that year. Since the Northern Wei army was not well-prepared, most officials and generals objected to the plan. Emperor Xiaowen nonetheless insisted and led most of his troops and officials southward from Pingcheng in September.[70] Then he intentionally delayed the march.[71] As historical records describe, when the large party arrived at Luoyang, they were suffering from the torturous march and implored Emperor Xiaowen to return to Pingcheng. The emperor objected since a return would indicate a failed march. Instead, he hinted to his officials about the transfer of the capital. In his speech, Emperor Xiaowen praised their Tuoba ancestors for their two southward migrations from the far north toward the central realm.[72] He then announced a similar migration and that he planned to transfer the capital to Luoyang. It is recorded in the *Weishu* that after one supporter stood up and echoed the emperor's idea, most of the officials agreed with their emperor's decision. Emperor Xiaowen thus issued the order to transfer his capital.[73]

This decision undoubtedly sparked serious objections from some Tuoba aristocrats. Emperor Xiaowen spent the whole of 494 traveling around his state convincing and comforting them. Some Tuoba reacted with fierce rejections. In January 497, Tuoba notables in Pingcheng secretly invited the crown prince, who firmly disagreed with his father's plan to change the capital, to return to Pingcheng, where they planned to support him as the new emperor. Emperor Xiaowen immediately suppressed this conspiracy and executed most of the Tuoba involved, including his crown prince.[74] Meanwhile, a new magnificent Luoyang was built.[75] On October 8 of 495, the Northern Wei relocated its central government and the residents of Pingcheng to Luoyang.[76]

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[70] Ibid., 7.172.
[71] Ibid., 7.172-72. Also see *ZZTJ*, 13.4337-40. During the march, Emperor Xiaowen visited various places of interest, sacrificed to ancient sages and deities, and talked to various local peoples.
[72] In their early period, the Tuoba tribe launched two southward migrations, which saw them migratig almost two thousand kilometers south to the frontier of the Western Jin. See Section 1.1.1.
[73] *WS*, 53.1183.
[74] Ibid., 14.361, 22. 588-89.
[75] For a detailed study of the layout of Luoyang, see Ping-ti Ho, "Lou-Yang, A.D. 495-534: A Study of Physical and Socioeconomic Planning of a Metropolitan Area," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 26(1966): 52-101.
[76] *WS*, 7.178. Luoyang served as the Northern Wei's capital until this dynasty collapsed in 534.

Historical records suggest that the Northern Wei people were proud of their new capital, and it also impressed politicians from the Southern Dynasties.[77] A southern general named Chen Qingzhi 陳慶之 (484-539) reportedly said:

> Since the Eastern Jin and the Liu Song dynasties, Luoyang has been described as a wasteland. We, the southern people, call places north of the Yangtze River "barbarous lands." Yesterday when I arrived in Luoyang, I started to understand that civilized gentries also reside in the central realm. Their rituals are so elaborate and the people are thriving to such an extent that my eyes failed to record it all and my mouth cannot fully describe.
> 自晉宋以來，號洛陽為荒土。此中謂長江以北，盡是夷狄。昨至洛陽，始知衣冠士族，並在中原。禮儀富盛，人物殷阜，目所不識，口不能傳。[78]

Luoyang's magnificence apparently changed Chen Qingzhi's previous view and caused him to agree that the Northern Wei were civilized and flourishing, and not a "barbarous" state, as he used to think. This vividly indicates that making Luoyang the capital was a powerful tool in bolstering the Northern Wei's legitimacy.

2.1.4 Chinese Cultural Conventions

Chinese dynasties often favored exporting Chinese culture, thereby expecting to extend their cultural influence and power. Non-Chinese dynasties also tended to adopt various Chinese cultural resources to make their rule acceptable to the Chinese.[79] The Northern Wei is just such a case. During the reign of the Emperor Xiaowen, the Northern Wei adopted various Chinese cultural practices to promote their dynasty as a

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[77] Yang Xuanzhi 楊衒之, *Luoyang qielan ji jiaojian* 洛陽珈藍記校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 113.
[78] Ibid., 114.
[79] The Manchu Qing's adoption of Chinese cultural conventions has received the most scholarly attention. A famous debate took place between Evelyn Rawski and Ping-ti Ho. The former scholar questioned whether the Qing had Sinicized itself and fully adopted Chinese cultural conventions. See Evelyn Rawski, "Presidential Address: Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55.4 (1996): 829-838. The latter scholar argues that the Qing Dynasty, like many other non-Chinese dynasties, willingly Sinicized itself. See Ping-ti Ho, "In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski's 'Reenvisioning the Qing," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57.1(1998): 128-152.

Chinese-style one, which supported Emperor Xiaowen and his dynasty's legitimacy.[80] To illustrate this point, the focus of this section is on two special but rarely studied cases, namely of how Emperor Xiaowen enhanced his legitimacy by (1) observing the basic Chinese virtue of filial piety (*xiao* 孝), and (2) adopting a Chinese-style state sacrificial ceremony.

(1) As noted in the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (*Classic of Filial Piety*), Confucius says, "In human conduct there is nothing more important than family reverence" 人之行莫大於孝.[81] This "family reverence," a translation by Rosemont and Ames, more commonly referred to as filial piety, was a fundamental virtue in Confucianism and Chinese culture. As Alan K. L. Chan says, "it would not be an exaggeration to say that the concern with *xiao* pervades all aspects of Chinese culture, both past and present."[82] A significant aspect of practicing filial piety is observing a three-year mourning period after the death of one's parents and grandparents.[83] To demonstrate their deepest regard for their deceased parents and grandparents, woeful children wore rough mourning apparel, ate vegetarian diets, resigned from their occupations, and precluded any entertainment until the third year.[84] The underlying reason for this mourning practice, as Confucius is quoted as saying in the *Analects*, is that "a child ceases to be nursed by his parents only when he is three years old. Three years' mourning is observed throughout the Empire" 子生三年, 然後免於父母之懷. 夫三年之喪, 天下之通喪也. (*Analects* 17:21)[85] Therefore, every person should mourn their deceased parents and grandparents for three years out of respect for the invaluable care they received from them in the first three years of their own existence. Starting from the Western Han Dynasty, the three-year mourning period began to prevail among ordinary people.[86] However, it was a challenge for emperors to observe

[80] During the reign of Emperor Xiaowen, the Tuoba people were asked to adopt Chinese surnames, speak the Chinese language, wear Chinese clothes, intermarry with Chinese people, and follow Chinese customs and rites. See Section 1.1.2.
[81] Henry Rosemont and Roger T. Ames, *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 110.
[82] Alan Chan, Kam-leung, and Sor-hoon Tan, *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History* (London: Psychology Press, 2004), 1.
[83] For a similar study of the three-year mourning period in ancient China, see Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11-34.
[84] Ding Linghua 丁凌華, *Zhongguo sangfu zhidu shi* 中國喪服制度史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000), 233-35. Some extremists would choose to live in a crude cabin near their parents' tombs during this period. Ibid., 243, 251.
[85] D. C. Lau, *The Analects*, 179.
[86] Ding Linghua, *Zhongguo sangfu*, 242-46.

the three-year mourning period since their states would have become unstable if their rulers had abandoned their responsibilities. Emperors of the Han Dynasty thus adopted a compromise. After a parent or grandparent of the emperor was buried, all the ordinary people wore mourning apparel for the first three days. The emperor and his officials observed a one-month mourning period.[87] Thereafter, the mourning period ended and society returned to normal.[88] However, after the Han Dynasty collapsed, this imperial manner of mourning was abandoned. Both the Cao Wei Dynasty and the Western Jin ended their imperial mourning periods after the burial day.[89]

The early Northern Wei emperors followed the mourning practice of the Western Jin Dynasty. Meanwhile, the Tuoba monarchs also maintained their Tuoba mourning customs, holding the ceremonies to pray for deities to the west and drive away evil to the north three months after the burial day.[90] However, in 490, when Dowager Wenming died, her grandson, Emperor Xiaowen, announced that he would observe the strict three-year mourning period. This decision aroused three kinds of objections among Tuoba officials, as the *Weishu* records.[91] (1) Some of them argued that the emperor's plan contradicted Tuoba customs. They also mentioned that Dowager Wenming herself, although being Chinese, had requested in her testament that everyone should follow the Tuoba mourning period. (2) Other Tuoba officials pointed out that none of the previous Chinese dynasties had adopted the three-year imperial mourning period. (3) The Chinese officials also rejected this plan.[92] Li Biao and Gao Lü, for example, indicated that any mourning period would be acceptable.[93] They claimed that only a few allegedly legendary rulers at the very beginning of Chinese civilization had observed the three-year mourning period. Even in the Han Dynasty, many emperors had failed to observe the one-month imperial mourning periods, yet were still viewed as legitimate by their people. They also mentioned that their country was far from at peace and people needed their emperor to return to rule as soon as possible.

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[87] According to Confucianism, the emperor was referred to as the parent of all humankind. Therefore, the emperor and his people should theoretically observe the same three-year mourning period if the old emperor, or a close relative of the emperor, passes away.
[88] Ding Linghua, *Zhongguo sangfu*, 238-41.
[89] *JS*, 20.613.
[90] *WS*, 108.2787.
[91] Ibid., 108.2778-80
[92] Ibid., 183.2780-87.
[93] Ibid., 183.2780-86.

Emperor Xiaowen, however, firmly insisted on his proposal, as the *Weishu* records. He declared, firstly, that a three-year mourning period was the only right way to express filial piety and convey his deepest respects to his deceased grandmother. He then argued that people gave high praise to legendary sage rulers who supposedly followed the three-year mourning custom, so why would his officials prevent him from following the virtuous example of legendary sage rulers.[94] In the end, Emperor Xiaowen proposed a compromise. His officials were asked to observe a three-month mourning period, while he himself observed a one-year mourning period. He then declared the abandonment of the former Tuoba mourning traditions.[95]

Emperor Xiaowen's deep regard for his grandmother is quite doubtful. Being an ambitious politician, Dowager Wenming allegedly killed the father of Emperor Xiaowen and established Emperor Xiaowen as a puppet emperor. Emperor Xiaowen reportedly had a miserable childhood under the strict control and frequent punishments of his grandmother.[96] Therefore, as a newly-enthroned emperor, Emperor Xiaowen intentionally presented himself as a paragon of Chinese virtue by insisting on a one-year mourning period, with the aim of improving his authority and legitimate status. The fact is that the Northern Wei was alone in adopting a one-year imperial mourning period. Even the contemporaneous Chinese dynasties in the south, as well as most subsequent Chinese dynasties, followed a one-month imperial mourning period.[97] Hence, Emperor Xiaowen distinguished himself as a more strict observer of the virtue of filial piety than any other monarchs in history.

Emperor Xiaowen also used other means to portray himself as a paragon of the virtue of filial piety. For instance, he promulgated the three-year mourning custom into law, requiring both Tuoba and Chinese to follow this rigorous Confucian mourning ritual.[98] Also, in order to allow the Tuoba to gain a better understanding of filial piety, Emperor Xiaowen commissioned a translation of the *Xiaojing* into the Xianbei language, which resulted in what was probably the first-ever translation of

[94] Ibid., 183.2786.
[95] Ibid., 183. 2783.
[96] Ibid., 7.186.
[97] Ding Linghua, *Zhongguo sangfu*, 245-246.
[98] The *Weishu* records that a Tuoba general was imprisoned for five years for missing one month of the three-year mourning period. This poor Tuoba general mistakenly included the leap month in his three-year mourning period for his deceased father, and thus came one month short of the mourning period required by Northern Wei law. See *WS*, 184.2796-98.

the *Xiaojing*.[99] Moreover, Emperor Xiaowen ordered the building of a Confucian temple in Luoyang in 489. This was, interestingly, the first time in Chinese history that a temple for Confucius was erected by the court in the capital city.[100] This action, as Holcombe says, "made the Xianbei-ruled Northern Wei Dynasty more Confucian than any previous Chinese dynasty had been."[101] To honor his observation of filial piety (*xiao* 孝), and his great achievements in cultured and civilized administration (*wen* 文), Emperor Xiaowen eventually received a posthumous name that combines both *xiao* and *wen*.[102]

As mentioned in the introduction, the ethnic criterion for legitimacy underpinned the Chinese monarch's adoption of Chinese culture, because it was a significant testimony to his *zhengtong* status. Even though Emperor Xiaowen was a Tuoba ruler, his observance of filial piety and support of Confucianism could still demonstrate that he was a sincere follower of Chinese culture, which definitely supported his legitimate status. Therefore, as subsequent chapters show, various pre-modern Chinese scholars, such as Wang Tong, Zhang Fangping and Chen Shidao, highlighted Emperor Xiaowen's adoption of Chinese culture to confirm his legitimate status.

(2) Emperor Xiaowen also introduced another Chinese custom, namely the "southern" sacrificial ceremony to Heaven.

Following the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven, the secular ruler receives the right to govern All Under Heaven from a sacred entity called Heaven. It was a custom in Chinese history that the ruler annually sacrificed to Heaven to ensure and manifest his inherited mandate from Heaven. Every first month of the lunar year, the ruler sacrificed a black ox and jade to Heaven at *yuanqiu* 圜丘, a round altar located on the southern outskirts of the capital.[103] The ruler conducted this sacrifice himself, burning the sacrificial objects and offering a cup of wine to Heaven. The memorial tablets of imperial ancestors also received the same sacrifices. This kind of sacrifice expressed what I call the cosmological criterion of legitimacy, which establishes a cosmological

[99] Wei Zheng 魏征 and others comp., *Suishu* 隋書 (History of the Sui Dynasty) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 32.935.
[100] Prior to the Northern Wei, the only official Confucian temple had been built by the Han Dynasty and was situated in Confucius' hometown of Qufu 曲阜.
[101] Holcombe, "The Xianbei in Chinese History," 26.
[102] *WS*, 7.186.
[103] There is a high degree of symbolism at play here: Heaven was considered round in shape, and the South was most the honorable cardinal direction in pre-modern China.

link between Heaven and the monarch as the foundation of political legitimacy. The sacrifice to Heaven thus served as one the most significant imperial ceremonies in ancient China.

The Northern Wei had adopted this "southern" sacrificial ceremony as soon as they established their dynasty.[104] The Tuoba rulers also had an indigenous ceremony: the sacrifice to the Tuoba's Heaven on the western outskirts of the capital. As the *Weishu* describes it, the Tuoba ruler, his concubines, and six other Tuoba noble family members headed toward the western outskirts in their traditional Tuoba clothes every fourth month of every lunar year. On top of the altar, they erected seven wooden puppets, which represented the seven ancestors of the Tuoba tribe. A female shaman beat the drums while all the participants rode on horseback around the altar. The youths from the six noble families conducted this sacrifice, killing and burning one white calf, one sheep, and a yellow horse.[105] This "western" sacrifice dates back to the Tuoba Liwei period, when this Tuoba chieftain announced himself chieftain of the Tuoba tribe.[106] Thereafter, all Tuoba rulers observed this ceremony, including many emperors of the Northern Wei.

The "southern" and "western" sacrifices clearly had similar functions: to testify to the ruler's legitimacy. However, they differed not only in terms of their procedures, but also in the extent of Heaven's blessings. The emperor conducted the "southern" sacrifice by himself, symbolizing that he had obtained the sole legitimate power ordained by Heaven. In the "western" sacrifice, by contrast, only Tuoba nobles participated, which demonstrated that the Tuoba's Heaven granted its mandate to all of the Tuoba nobility. In other words, this manner of sacrifice indicated that the Tuoba leader shared that legitimacy with his Tuoba noblemen.

While both types of sacrifice were performed by the Northern Wei, they were treated differently. The *Weishu* records that only the first Tuoba emperor, Tuoba Gui, had attended the "southern" sacrifice in 399. Later Northern Wei emperors had perfunctorily asked their Chinese officials to officiate at this sacrifice on their behalf. By contrast, the Tuoba emperors had always been present at the "western" sacrifice.[107] This vividly indicates that the Northern Wei emperors had not sought legitimacy from

[104] *WS*, 108.2734.
[105] Ibid., 108.2736. For a more detailed study, see Kang Le, *Cong xijiao*, 168-175.
[106] *WS*, 1.3.
[107] Ibid., 184.2813.

the Chinese Heaven but treated the "southern" sacrifice as a kind of Chinese-style ornamentation.[108]

This changed when Emperor Xiaowen took over. He embraced the "southern" sacrifice step by step. In 486, he attended the "western" sacrifice but wore a Chinese imperial robe.[109] In 488, he ordered the rebuilding and extension of the *yuanqiu*, the altar for the Chinese "southern" sacrifice.[110] In the first month of 489, he attended and conducted his first "southern" sacrifice.[111] In 493, he refused to attend the Tuoba "western" sacrifice. Two years later, when he moved his capital to Luoyang, Emperor Xiaowen completely abolished this Tuoba sacrifice, as well as most other Tuoba state ceremonies.[112] This Tuoba emperor obviously felt that he did not need the legitimacy of the Tuoba Heaven anymore. He identified himself as a Chinese emperor, one who derived his legitimacy solely from the Chinese Heaven.

Emperor Xiaowen's wish to strengthen his power partially explains why he abandoned the traditional Tuoba state ceremonies. The "western" sacrifices indicated power-sharing between the Tuoba leader and the noblemen. It is predictable that the ambitious Emperor Xiaowen would favor the "southern" sacrificial ceremony more to highlight his supreme authority. Moreover, Emperor Xiaowen's final adoption of Chinese state ceremonies could have enabled him to validate himself as a true follower of Chinese culture, which, as with observing filial piety, could further support his legitimacy.

2.1.5 Diplomacy

The doctrine of All Under Heaven established the central realm as the supreme state compared with all the other states in All Under Heaven.[113] This doctrine could thus be seen to support the idea that a dynasty that occupied the central realm could manifest its legitimate status by asking other states to accept its supreme status. Following a

[108] A relevant figure shows that, up to that point, more than eighty percent of the middle and upper positions in the Northern Wei were occupied by the Tuoba people. Chinese officials were a minority; they mostly served as cultural consultants. See Kang Le, *Cong xijiao*, 67.
[109] *WS*, 181.2741.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., 7.164. In June of that year, Emperor Xiao also attended the sacrificed to the Earth, another significant Chinese sacrifice ceremony. Ibid., 181.2741. The sacrifice to Heaven and Earth were the two most significant national sacrifices in relation to pre-modern Chinese politics.
[112] Ibid., 7.169, 184.2743. Also see Kang Le, *Cong xijiao*, 188.
[113] See the introduction.

chronological order, in this section the four stages in which the Northern Wei established its supreme status in the diplomatic field are distinguished.

(1) In its early period the Northern Wei Dynasty was weak and it therefore maintained relatively friendly relations with the Eastern Jin and the ensuing Liu Song.[114] It occasionally even sent troops to aid the Eastern Jin in combating the Later Qin, as the *Weishu* records.[115] Although both the Eastern Jin and Liu Song dynasties declared themselves to be the rulers of the central realm, the Northern Wei did not directly challenge that. However, these friendly relations would not last long, since the Northern Wei was gradually becoming more confident in its power.

(2) In 422, the Northern Wei broke the peace and entered into war with the Liu Song. Within a couple of years, the Northern Wei had conquered much territory north of the Huai River.[116] The Liu Song Dynasty established an alliance against the Northern Wei, which consisted of the Rouran, the Northern Liang 北凉 (397-439), the Northern Yan, Tuyuhun 吐谷渾 (313-663) and some other states.[117] This alliance launched several joint military attacks against the Northern Wei, but all failed.[118] The Northern Wei resorted to both diplomatic and military methods to destroy the alliance. The following paragraphs provide a glimpse of how the Northern Wei forced two members, the Rouran state and the Northern Liang, to eventually surrender to its rule.

According to the *Weishu*, the Rouran state was established by the Rouran tribe, which supposedly consisted of fugitive slaves of the Tuoba tribe who had been humble subjects of the Dai state.[119] However, after the Northern Wei was established and transferred its attention to northern China, the Rouran tribe rebelled and soon ruled over the steppes. In 402, the Rouran established their state and continually invaded Northern Wei territory thereafter.[120] The Northern Wei reacted with frequent attacks and brought the Rouran state to its knees in 431.[121] However, this peace lasted for only four years. The restored Rouran allied with the Liu Song and attacked the

[114] Ibid., 2.28. *ZZTJ*, 125. 3747. Various states existed in the contemporaneous central realm and some of them, such as the Later Yan, Later Qin, and Southern Yan 南燕 (398-410), were the common enemies of both the Northern Wei and its southern peers.
[115] *WS*, 2.35, 33.787-88.
[116] Ibid., 3.62-63.
[117] *SS*, 95.2337.
[118] *ZZTJ*, 125-3946. *SS*, 95.246.
[119] *WS*, 103,2289.
[120] Ibid., 103,2291-93.
[121] Ibid., 103. 2293. The Rouran also married one of their princesses to Emperor Taiwu to manifest their obeisance.

Northern Wei again in 435.[122] Angered by the perceived treachery of the Rouran state, the Northern Wei rebranded this state *Ruru* 蠕蠕, a word that describes the Rouran people as worms (*ru* 蠕).[123] Thereupon, the Northern Wei continually weakened the Rouran's power by launching periodic strikes, establishing frontier garrisons, building frontier walls, and settling nomadic people. At some point, the Rouran asked for peace, but the Northern Wei firmly rejected their request. Only in 478, when the Rouran agreed to serve as vassals and promised to pay regular tribute, did the Northern Wei cease the attacks and thereafter maintained peaceful relations with the Rouran state until it collapsed in the mid-sixth century CE.[124]

The Northern Liang, another ally of the Liu Song Dynasty, was not so fortunate. This northwestern state dominated a large part of what is now Northwest China in the early fifth century CE. It submitted to the Northern Wei in 435 after witnessing the unstoppable triumph of the Tuoba troops. To control the Northern Liang, Tuoba Tao not only appointed the King of Northern Liang as General of the Western Campaigns (*zhengxi da jiangjun* 征西大將軍) and as King of Liang 涼王,[125] but also asked the King of Liang to intermarry with the Tuoba royal family and send a prince to Pingcheng as a hostage.[126] However, the Northern Liang also subjected themselves to the Liu Song, even after they had submitted to the Northern Wei. They even secretly joined the anti-Northern Wei alliance and supported the Rouran state in its wars against the Northern Wei.[127] The Northern Liang's betrayal was a serious challenge to the Northern Wei's supreme status. In 439, Tuoba Tao announced twelve proofs of the Northern Liang's guilt, which principally centered on irreverence toward the Northern Wei. For example, the third one reads "although [the King of Northern Liang] had already accepted the title of nobility [from the Northern Wei], [he] additionally received an illegitimate official title [from the Liu Song Dynasty]" 既荷王爵又授偽官.[128] The Northern Wei thereupon sent its troops to the Northern Liang and soon conquered this vassal.

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[122] Ibid., 103.2294. One of the reasons is that the Northern Wei at that time strove to control inner Asia, an area within the sphere of influence of the Rouran state.
[123] Ibid., 103.2289
[124] Ibid., 103.2296.
[125] Ibid., 99.2205.
[126] Ibid. For hostages in ancient China, see Yang Lien-sheng, "Hostages in Chinese History," 507-521.
[127] *WS*, 102.2260.
[128] Ibid., 99.2207.

During the reign of Tuoba Tao, the Northern Wei not only defeated the allies of Liu Song, including the Rouran and Northern Liang mentioned above, but also launched a major counterattack against the Liu Song in 450. That attack, while ultimately failing, caused the Liu Song Dynasty considerable suffering. To reach an accord, the two dynasties recognized each other as equals, leading to decades of peace.[129]

(3) In the latter half of the fifth century CE, the Northern Wei treated the Liu Song and its successor, the Southern Qi, as equal states in diplomatic communications. The *Weishu* reports that the Northern Wei not only maintained a high frequency of diplomatic interactions with the south during this period, but also selected Chinese cultural elites as its diplomats, aiming to demonstrate that the Northern Wei was civilized and akin to a Chinese state.[130] The diplomatic interactions notwithstanding, the Northern Wei still harbored dreams of supremacy and continued to undermine its opponents' legitimacy in surreptitious ways, which resulted in the diplomatic tragedy described below.

After the Southern Qi replaced the Liu Song Dynasty, the Northern Wei sheltered diplomats of the Liu Song Dynasty. The *Weishu* notes that in 483, the Northern Wei held an official dinner and invited all the diplomats. Intentionally, the diplomat of Southern Qi was asked to sit below the diplomat of the Liu Song Dynasty. The Southern Qi diplomat reacted with fierce protest and refused to attend the dinner. This lesser seat, he argued, indicated that the Northern Wei viewed the Southern Qi as inferior to the Liu Song, even though the former had replaced the latter. Liu Chang 劉昶 (436-497), a refugee prince of the Liu Song who was appointed King of Song 宋王 by the Northern Wei, secretly hired an assassin to kill the Southern Qi diplomat.[131] To appease the Southern Qi, the Northern Wei executed the assassin and repatriated the Liu Song's diplomat.[132]

Meanwhile, the Northern Wei prevented its vassals from establishing diplomatic communications with the Southern Dynasties, which could have challenged its supreme status.[133] Take the Gaogouli 高句麗 (37 BCE-668 CE), the ancestor of

[129] Ibid., 4.105.
[130] *SS*, 9.2354, 108-111. *WS*, 48.1091
[131] *WS*, 59.1308.
[132] Ibid., 7.151.
[133] Fairbank makes a similar observation in relation to the imperial Chinese tributary system, saying that "if the rest of mankind did not acknowledge his rule, how long could he expect China to do so?

present-day Korea, as an example. This state was one of the most significant vassals of the Northern Wei.[134] In 435, the Gaogouli state asked to be a vassal of the Northern Wei and demonstrated its subjection by requesting Tuoba Tao to confer a title upon its ruler.[135] The Northern Wei obliged by providing each successive Gaogouli ruler with an official title, thereby highlighting that the Northern Wei was the legitimate overlord of the Gaogouli state. Of all the vassals of the Northern Wei, the Gaogouli paid tribute most frequently: a total of 96 times and normally twice a year.[136] However, this state's loyalty wavered. After becoming a vassal of the Northern Wei, it still maintained a minor degree of diplomatic communication with the Southern Dynasties and secretly sent envoys and tribute.[137] The Northern Wei thus kept a vigilant eye on this vassal. In the reign of Emperor Xiaowen, a local official intercepted some of the Gaogouli's envoys, who had been sent to pay tribute to the Southern Qi Dynasty. Emperor Xiaowen fiercely criticized Gaogouli for its betrayal and threatened it with a military response.[138] The ruler of Gaogouli apologized and ceased its relationship with the Southern Qi immediately.

(4) The peace between the north and south ended in the late fifth century CE. Emperor Xiaowen attempted to conquer the Southern Qi with a view to unifying the central realm and becoming the sole holder of the Mandate of Heaven. In 496, he accused the Southern Qi of being illegitimate and thereafter waged war against the south.[139] Later emperors of the Northern Wei also adopted a hostile attitude towards the Southern Dynasties until their dynasty collapsed.

This section reveals how the Northern Wei attempted to demonstrate its supreme status in the diplomatic field. In its early period, the Northern Wei maintained friendly relations with the Eastern Jin and the subsequent Liu Song. After consolidating its rule in northern China, the Northern Wei fiercely competed with the Liu Song for supreme status. In the latter half of the fifth century, the Northern Wei maintained peace with the Southern Dynasties. It treated its southern peers as equal

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Tribute (from vassals) had prestige value in the government of China, where prestige was an all-important tool of government." See Fairbank, John K. "Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 1.02 (1942): 135.

[134] *WS*, 100.2224.

[135] Ibid., 100.2214-15.

[136] Ibid., 100.2215.

[137] *SS*, 97.2392. Before the Northern Wei was established, the Gaogouli had agreed with the legitimate status of the Eastern Jin, accepting conferred titles from that dynasty.

[138] *WS*, 100.2216

[139] Ibid., 7.176.

states in the diplomatic field, but also employed diplomatic means (such as sheltering refugees of the Southern Dynasties) to undermine the Southern Dynasties' legitimacy and prevented its vassals from having contact with the south. Finally, Emperor Xiaowen resumed the war against the Southern Dynasties in order to unify the central realm.

2.2 Preserving Legitimacy: Practices of the Southern Dynasties

The Southern Dynasties followed one after another by succeeding their predecessors' rule. They thus focused on practices that would preserve their inherited legitimacy. This section comprises a discussion of how the Southern Dynasties preserved their legitimacy by means of four methods: (1) by subscribing to the practice of abdication, (2) by noting auspicious portents, (3) by reproducing the central realm, and (4) by gaining diplomatic support.

2.2.1 Abdication

Historians such as Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727-1814) identify two types of dynastic succession in Chinese history.[140] The first one was violent replacement, whereby the emerging dynasty conquered and replaced the previous one. The second was abdication, whereby the last monarch of the old dynasty gave up his throne and transferred it to the founder of the new dynasty. The latter type prevailed in medieval China. Dynasties such as the Cao Wei, Western Jin, Southern Dynasties, Northern Qi, Northern Zhou, Sui, and Tang, all followed the practice of abdication to establish their rules. Specifically, all dynasties in the Southern Dynasties period took certain steps to perform abdication and relied heavily on that practice to support their legitimacy. Therefore, in this section, I study one specific case of abdication in the Southern Dynasties and investigate how an abdication could legitimate a newly established dynasty.

The practice of abdication in China derives from ancient legends about two sage kings, Yao 堯 and Shun 舜, who supposedly selflessly transferred their rule to their most virtuous officials.[141] The legends describe both kings as first appointing their

[140] Zhao Yi, *Nianershi zhaji*, 143.
[141] *Shangshu Zhengyi*, 19-49, 50-84.

most virtuous and prominent officials, Shun and Yu 禹 respectively, as their assistants. In the years that followed, the two kings and others observed the performances of these assistants. Given that the two candidates manifested outstanding talent, the kings successfully convinced the people that they qualified to be kings. The reigning kings then resigned their kingships and transferred their thrones to their qualified successors. As Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, Allan, and Pines note, these legends were invented and circulated in the Warring States period.[142] Some texts of that period argue for the moral superiority of abdication and insist on its practice.[143] Other texts, however, questioned the abdication legends. According to Pines, "some, as Zhuangzi (莊子, d.c. 280 BCE), questioned the morality of abdication heroes and sought to undermine their position as infallible paragons. Others, such as Xunzi (荀子, c. 310 BCE-218 BCE) and especially his disciple, Han Feizi, opposed the doctrine of abdication primarily due to its negative impact on political stability and on the ruler's position."[144] These objections notwithstanding, at the end of the Western Han's reign, the usurper Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE-23 CE) successfully forced the incumbent ruler to abdicate in his favor.[145] Thereafter, Cao Pi 曹丕 (r. 220-226), the founder of the Cao Wei Dynasty (220-266), likewise forced an abdication in 220, which initiated a series of similar examples.[146] The Western Jin Dynasty and all the Southern Dynasties were established by means of forced abdications and they followed a common abdication

[142] Gu Jiegang considers the abdication legend to be a fabrication by Mohism in the Spring and Autumn period. See Gu Jiegang, "Shanrang chuanshuo qiyu mojia kao 禪讓傳說起于墨家考," in *Gushibian* 古史辨, ed. Lü Simian 呂思勉 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1941), 58-62. Sarah Allan provides a detailed study of the structure of the abdication legends. See Allan, *The Heir and the Sage*. Pines describes how thinkers in the pre-Qin period discussed the abdication legends. See Pines, "Disputers of Abdication: Zhanguo Egalitarianism and the Sovereign's Power," *T'oung Pao* 4-5 (2005): 243-300.

[143] One recently unearthed bamboo manuscript, "Tang Yu zhi dao" 唐虞之道, argues that abdication "benefits *tianxia*, not the king himself, and thus becomes the manifestation of supreme *ren* (benevolence)" 利天下而弗利也, 仁之至也. See Li Ling 李 零, *Guodian chujian jiaodu ji* 郭店楚簡校讀記 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), 192. Pines conducted an analysis of this bamboo manuscript; see Pines, "Disputers of Abdication," 257-263.

[144] Ibid., 282.

[145] Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of Han Dynasty) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 99.4065-99. Wang Mang thereafter established the short-lived Xin Dynasty 新朝 (9-23 CE).

[146] *SGZ*, 2.58-62. Cao Pi usurped the throne from Emperor Xian of the Eastern Han 漢獻帝 (r. 189-220). For further studies, see Knechtges, "The Rhetoric of Imperial Abdication," 3-35. Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, 162-169.

procedure.[147] The following section focuses on the actions of Xiao Daocheng, the founder of the Southern Qi, in order to illustrate this common abdication procedure.

When the royal family members of the Liu Song Dynasty became embroiled in continuous strife, Xiao Daocheng, a distinguished general, gradually gained prominence and secretly induced an imperial servant to kill Emperor Houfei 後廢帝 (r. 473-477) in August 477.[148] He then crowned a puppet emperor, Emperor Shun 順帝 (r. 477-479) and manipulated him into implementing four abdication procedures.[149]

(1) The first procedure was to eliminate potential dissenters. On August 9, Xiao Daocheng was given the title of Commandery Duke of Jinling (*jinling jungong* 競陵郡公) and Cavalry General-in-chief (*piaoji dajiangjun* 驃騎大將軍).[150] Two months later, he was appointed as the governor of three significant northern regions of the Liu Song Dynasty.[151] His opponents then rose up to prevent Xiao Daocheng's usurpation. In January 478, the governor of Jingzhou, accompanied by few court dignitaries, fought against Xiao Daocheng. The latter soon suppressed the uprising and executed the dissenters.[152]

(2) The second procedure was to grab political and military power. In March 478, Xiao Daocheng was appointed as Defender-in-chief (*taiwei* 太尉).[153] In April 479, the puppet emperor appointed Xiao Daocheng as Counselor-in-chief (*xiangguo* 相國) and Duke of Qi 齊公. Ten commanderies were given to Xiao Daocheng as fiefs.[154] The puppet emperor also conferred upon Xiao Daocheng the "nine most honored awards" (*jiuxi* 九錫), which are a royal carriage, cloth, a threshold, gate, bow and arrow, axe, three hundred guardsmen, kingly musical instruments, and wine.[155] Xiao Daocheng is said to have "modestly" rejected appointments and awards from his emperor. The puppet emperor insisted and issued a long edict to persuade him.[156] Xiao Daocheng then accepted these appointments and awards.

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[147] Zhao Yi also noted common procedures concerning the abdication. See Zhao Yi, *Nianershi zhaji*, 13.273.
[148] *NQS*, 1.7, 10.
[149] Ibid., 1.10-11.
[150] Ibid., 1.11.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid., 1.11-13.
[153] Ibid., 1.14.
[154] Ibid..
[155] The *jiuxi* was devised by Wang Mang and served as a crucial procedure for all abdication.
[156] *NQS*, 1.14-19.

(3) The third procedure was the direct practice of abdication. On May 8, Xiao Daocheng was promoted to the position of King of Qi 齊王 and given ten more fiefs, effectively making a large proportion of the Liu Song Dynasty his territory.[157] On May 21, Xiao Daocheng was entitled to conduct the whole series of imperial rituals, wearing imperial clothing, and possessing other imperial instruments.[158] Xiao Daocheng then possessed all that was required to be an emperor, except the title.

On May 26, the puppet emperor issued three edicts to effect the abdication. The first informed his people of his decision to abdicate.[159] The second edict appointed Xiao Daocheng as the new emperor.[160] The last was "the imperial seal letter" (*xishu* 璽書), in which the puppet emperor informed Xiao Daocheng of the transfer of the jade seal (*yuxi* 玉璽), the symbol of imperial power in ancient China.[161] These edicts have similar contents. First, the edicts admitted that the Liu Song Dynasty had lost its mandate. Next, the edicts reiterated the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven and argued that only the most virtuous and capable persons would receive it. Thirdly, the edicts cited abdication legends, as well as abdications in history, "proving" that this practice was the rightful method of transferring dynastic power. Finally, the edicts declared the abdication and argued that Xiao Daocheng was the new legitimate recipient of the mandate because of his great merits and virtues.

Xiao Daocheng firmly rejected the abdication until waves of officials came to persuade him to accept. The imperial astronomer sent the last persuasion and pointed out that various auspicious portents had predicted the enthronement of Xiao Daocheng, who then agreed to the abdication and readied himself to ascend the throne.[162]

On May 29, Xiao Daocheng held his inauguration ceremony in the southern countryside. He sacrificed to Heaven and recited his inauguration speech.[163] This speech reiterated and praised the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven and the abdication legend. It then cited the dynastic phase theory and announced that the Water Phase (of the Liu Song) had become faint and the Liu Song Dynasty had lost its

[157] Ibid., 1.19.
[158] Ibid., 1.19.
[159] Ibid., 1.19-20.
[160] Ibid., 1.20-21.
[161] Ibid., 1.21-23.
[162] Ibid., 1.23.
[163] Ibid., 2.31. This speech was written in an antique style, not a contemporary writing style and, in my view, imitates the inauguration speech of the *Book of Documents*.

mandate. Xiao Daocheng then underlined his own merits and virtues, demonstrating that he was the new legitimate emperor. He also made it clear that his enthronement was supported by his officials, his people and various auspicious portents from Heaven. His speech ended with an oath to Heaven that he would not betray his people's trust or disappoint their expectations. After the inauguration, Xiao Daocheng issued his first edict to inform all his subjects of his enthronement. This edict declared a national amnesty and presented "Establishing the Beginning" (*Jianyuan* 建元) as the title of his reign, in order to indicate the beginning of the Southern Qi Dynasty.[164]

(4) The last procedure of abdication was to choose so-called "Two Post-Kings" (*er wang hou* 二王后).[165] Xiao Daocheng appointed the abdicated puppet emperor as King of Ruyin 汝陰王, and the royal descendent of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (the predecessor of the Liu Song Dynasty) as King of Lingling 零陵王, and entitled them to preserve their limited royal rituals and status.[166] These appointments aimed to exhibit the great morality of Xiao Daocheng, as well as the historical link between the Southern Qi and its previous dynasties. With this procedure, the abdication was completed.

The above description of the founding of the Southern Qi corresponds, by and large, to Lance Eccles's findings on the establishment of the Liang.[167] From our overview, it is possible to arrive at a general idea of abdication practices in the Southern Dynasties. The following steps were usually followed: The usurper first obtained military power and established a puppet emperor. Thereafter, he gradually increased his influence and kept a vigilant eye on potential opponents. After defeating any opposition, the usurper grasped all military and political power, and promoted himself to the position of duke and later king. The puppet emperor then "voluntarily" abdicated and "sincerely" persuaded the usurper to ascend the throne. The usurper

[164] Ibid., 2.32.

[165] For more detailed studies about this institution, see Du You 杜佑, *Tongdian* 通典 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1988), 74.2029. This institution was allegedly established by these sage rulers in the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors period (around the 20th century BCE).

[166] *NQS*, 2.32. The Liu Song Dynasty also followed this convention and appointed the abdicated emperor of the Eastern Jin and his successors as King of Lingling.

[167] Eccles, "The Seizure of the Mandate," 169-178. This paper offers us six procedures of abdication in establishing the Liang Dynasty, which are quite similar to what was mentioned in this section. The first step is to deprive the last emperor of previous dynasty of the imperial title. The second is to obtain the title of prince, thereby having the access to the throne. The third step is to dispose of all other potential competitors. The fourth step is the feigned reluctance to accept the throne. The fifth step is to ascend the throne. The last one is to bestow posthumous imperial titles on the parents of the new emperor, thus ensuring the full legitimacy of the succession. By taking these six steps, Xiao Yan established his new dynasty, the Liang Dynasty.

"modestly" refused several times before finally "reluctantly" accepting the throne. The aforementioned steps recurred repeatedly in most cases of abdication in medieval Chinese history.[168]

Two factors could account for the popularity of using the abdication method to acquire imperial power. First, from the perspective of what I call the moral criterion of legitimacy in the introduction, which stresses a strong relation between a monarch's moral character and his political legitimacy, the practice of abdication serves to highlight virtuous behavior. The last ruler of the old dynasty "selflessly" abdicated after he admitting to his loss of the mandate, while the founder of the new dynasty, or the usurper, "humbly" ascended the throne because of his superior morality. This practice resulted in a peaceful regime change and directly supported the usurper's authority. This explains why the founders of the Southern Dynasties employed the abdication method, rather than establishing their rule through violent conquest.

Secondly, the abdication fits in with the historical criterion of legitimacy, in which a dynasty's right to rule derives from its historical link with preceding dynasties. The process of abdication ensured that the Southern Dynasties could draw upon the legitimacy of their predecessors. Following this process, the Cao Wei Dynasty succeeded the Han Dynasty, which was seen as a great and legitimate Chinese dynasty. Thereafter, both the Western Jin Dynasty and all Southern Dynasties continued to practice this abdication procedure without interruption, thus securing legitimacy for each consecutive dynasty. This largely accounts for why the Southern Dynasties, even though they failed to take back northern China and were less successful in political and military activities than the Northern Wei, were nonetheless certain of their legitimacy.

However, the abdication method also has two crucial weaknesses. Firstly, its frequent and careless application weakened its credibility. Members of both the Western Jin and the Liu Song dynasties took a few decades to engage in serious preparation to execute their abdications. Other Southern Dynasties (Southern Qi, Liang, and Chen), however, came to view abdication as an easy method, so they took less time to prepare. In fact, these dynasties took less than two years to prepare, eventually causing them lose their power more easily. Secondly, the original abdication legend highlights the selflessness of the sage king and the virtues and

[168] Similar procedures could be seen in the establishment of the Cao Wei Dynasty, the Western Jin, the Southern Dynasties, the Northern Qi, the Northern Zhou, the Sui and Tang Dynasties.

talents of the successors. The abdication of the Southern Dynasties, however, highlighted the incompetence of the active ruler and feigned the modesty of the usurper. If the abdicated emperor was allegedly incompetent and illegitimate, what gave him the right to transfer the Mandate of Heaven to others? The abdication hence gradually failed to demonstrate that the usurpation was a "virtuous" and legitimate dynastic transfer. The above two limitations reduced the legitimate status of the Southern Dynasties. The usurpers in fact fully appreciated this problem and introduced some more persuasive and convincing evidence to legitimate their rule, as discussed in the following sections.

2.2.2 Auspicious Portents

Auspicious portents in ancient China were seen as a visible testimony to political legitimacy.[169] They are again related to the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven. To prove that they qualified to be recipients of the mandate, Chinese rulers not only demonstrated their virtuous behavior and great merits but also referred to auspicious portents. As the Han Dynasty thinker Dong Zhongshu pointed out, Heaven manifested its support of the monarch's rule through various auspicious cosmic phenomena.[170] Auspicious portents are therefore also related to the cosmological criterion of legitimacy outlined in the introduction, in terms of which a cosmological link between Heaven and the secular regime was seen as a foundation of legitimacy. Although various scholars questioned the credibility of auspicious omens in relation to legitimacy throughout Chinese history,[171] Chinese dynasties continued to place great emphasis on recording auspicious portents, especially the Southern Dynasties, which noted down many more auspicious portents than the Northern Wei and most other dynasties.[172] This section focuses on auspicious portents in the Liu Song Dynasty that are recorded in the *Songshu* and investigate how this dynasty cited such portents to enhance its legitimacy.

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[169] Beck also provides a study of auspicious portents in the Han Dynasty. See Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han*, 156-164. The Cao Wei Dynasty also introduced similar portents to support their legitimacy. See Goodman, *Ts' ao P'i Transcendent*, 133-138.

[170] Su Yu 蘇輿, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 100.

[171] Liu Pujiang investigated the Song's scholars' questions about the auspicious omens. See Liu Pujiang, "The End of the Five Virtues Theory: Changes of traditional political culture in China since the Song Dynasty," *Frontiers of History in China* 2 (2007): 514-25.

[172] The Northern Wei also recorded down some similar auspicious portents to support their legitimacy, see *WS*, 112.2927-2967.

It is somewhat difficult to categorize the auspicious portents recorded by the Liu Song Dynasty, given that the *Songshu* does not provide a classification. Fortunately, historians during the Tang Dynasty period (618-907) provided a four-level classification to note the auspicious portents: (1) astronomical and natural phenomena, (2) beasts, (3) birds, and (4) plants.[173] This classification also fits the Liu Song case and is therefore used in the subsequent discussion.

(1) The highest group of auspicious portents consisted of two sub-types: astronomical phenomena and natural phenomena.

Ancient Chinese astronomers believed that a comet passing over the Supreme Palace constellation (*taiwei* 太微) indicated the appearance of a new legitimate emperor or dynasty.[174] Similarly, the conjunction of four stars – Jupiter (*suixing* 歲星), Mars (*yinhuo* 熒惑), Saturn (*tianxing* 填星) and Venus (*taibaixing* 太白星) – in the night sky signified the same thing.[175] The appearance of Venus in the daytime also indicated a dynastic change.[176] In 420, the official astronomer of the Eastern Jin Dynasty reported the appearance of all three kinds of astronomically auspicious portents and succeeded in persuading Liu Yu to ascend the throne.[177]

Auspicious natural phenomena include, for instance, the Yellow River and Ji River 濟河 suddenly clearing, and the appearance of sweet dew (*ganlu* 甘露) on leaves. The Yellow River and the Ji River were two of the four most significant rivers in early ancient China (the other two being the Yangtze River and the Huai River).[178] These two muddy rivers often flooded the North China Plain in summer. Ancient and early Chinese people suffered much from these two hazardous rivers and thus cherished the belief that these rivers would turn clear when a sage and ideal monarch appeared.[179] From the Eastern Han Dynasty, the clearing of the Yellow River became a significant auspicious portent. The Liu Song Dynasty also noted this portent three

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[173] Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and others comp., *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (History of Tang Dynasty) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 46.1194.
[174] *SS*, 27.785.
[175] Ibid., 25.735-36.
[176] Ibid., 27.784.
[177] Ibid., 27.784-86.
[178] In the early Southern Song Dynasty, the Yellow River ran into the course of the Ji River, making the latter disappear.
[179] For more detailed studies of this prophecy, see Wang Xinguang 王星光 and Peng Yong 彭勇, "Lishi shiqi de huanghe qing xianxiang chutan 歷史時期的黃河清現象初探," *Shixue yuekan* 9 (2002): 29-35.

times during the reign of Emperor Wen and Emperor Xiaowu.[180] As for the appearance of sweet dew,[181] the *Songshu* explains that it appears only when Heaven is moved by the great virtue of the ruler.[182] Clearly, this portent indicated the existence of an immensely virtuous ruler. It is little wonder then that the Liu Song carefully noted more than 80 appearances of sweet dew.[183]

(2) The second group consisted of the appearance of various animals that we could call legendary, such as a dragon (*long* 龍), or animals that are real but rare, such as a white tiger or a white deer.

The dragon was the totem of Chinese civilization. This legendary animal was seen as the leader of all the animals and thus served as the symbol of the ruler in Chinese history. Noting the appearance of dragons was also a popular means of legitimating the establishment of a dynasty. In practice, around the time in which a dynasty was established, a dragon of a specific color – which happened to be the color corresponding to the dynastic phase of that dynasty – was said to appear. In January 420, the appearance of four black dragons was reported (the Liu Song Dynasty adopted the Water Phase with the corresponding color black).[184] Soon after that, the newborn Liu Song Dynasty announced this portent to legitimate its establishment.[185] The appearance of dragons could also serve to strengthen the emperors' authority and legitimacy even after the founding of the dynasty. The dragons in these cases were not limited to specific colors. The *Songshu* records the appearances of four black and three yellow dragons during the reigns of Emperor Wen and Emperor Xiaowu of the Liu Song Dynasty.[186]

The appearance of rare animals, which often had abnormal white or red coloring, was more common than the appearance of legendary ones.[187] The white tiger was seen as a benevolent and magical beast. As the *Songshu* explains, the white tiger forsakes its cruel nature and becomes so virtuous that it no longer kills and eats other animals. The *Songshu* continues by saying that only when a virtuous monarch is in

[180] *SS*, 29.872.
[181] Ibid. 28.813-17. The Western and Eastern Han Dynasties in total recorded this portent 13 times and the Western and Eastern Jin Dynasties recorded it 45 times in total.
[182] Ibid., 28.813.
[183] Ibid., 28.817-23.
[184] Ibid., 27.785.
[185] Ibid., 28. 799-800.
[186] Ibid., 28.800.
[187] Most of these animals were white, which indicate albino varieties.

power does the similarly virtuous white tiger appear.[188] In all, the Liu Song Dynasty noted six appearances of white tigers.[189] Some other rare animals were also viewed as auspicious, according to the *Songshu*: the white elephant (two appearances in the Liu Song Dynasty) emerged when the monarch lived a moderate life;[190] the white hare (15 appearances) appeared when the ruler expresses his sincere filial piety to his elders;[191] the white wapiti (24 appearances in the Liu Song Dynasty) emerged when the monarch ensured the wellbeing of his people;[192] the white musk deer (25 appearances) materialized when the monarch justly practiced the law.[193]

(3) The third group of favorable portents is the appearance of auspicious birds, either legendary, such as a phoenix (*fenghuang* 鳳凰), or rare, such as abnormally colored (white and red) birds.

The phoenix played a similar role in ancient Chinese civilization to the dragon. The *Songshu* states that the phoenix can "understand all things, know the merit of Heaven, characterize all forms, comprehend the royal way" 究萬物, 通天祉, 象百狀, 達王道.[194] The appearance of a phoenix, like a dragon, indicated the existence of a sage and ideal monarch, and it is therefore perhaps unsurprising that a phoenix is said to have appeared in 420, the year in which Liu Yu ascended the throne.[195] Two other phoenix appearances were reported, in the reigns of Emperor Wen and Emperor Xiaowu.[196]

In most cases, the rare but auspicious birds had a close relationship with a rightful ruler. The appearance of auspicious birds indicated that the ruler governed virtuously and rightfully. The white crow (12 appearances in the Liu Song Dynasty) emerged when "the true king solemnly sacrifices [to his ancestors] in the ancestral temple" 王者宗廟肅敬則至.[197] The white sparrow (46 appearances) appeared when "the true king justly grants his official a noble title and salary" 王者爵祿均則至.[198] The green crow (two appearances) similarly appeared when the true king treats his

[188] *SS*, 28.807.
[189] Ibid., 28.808-09.
[190] Ibid., 28.802
[191] Ibid., 29.838-39.
[192] Ibid., 28.803.
[193] Ibid., 28.809.
[194] Ibid., 28.793.
[195] Ibid., 28.795.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid, 29.841-43.
[198] Ibid., 29.843-47.

people mercifully.[199] In some cases, certain kinds of birds were seen as auspicious because they allegedly appeared in the times of ancient sage kings. If they reappeared in later periods, people believed that this indicated that their rulers were as virtuous as the ancient sage kings. The red sparrow supposedly appeared in the reign of King Wen of Zhou 周文王 (11th century BCE) and the Liu Song Dynasty recorded two appearances.[200] The red crow had supposedly carried an ear of millet to King Wu of Zhou 周武王 (11th century BCE) and it reappeared twice in the Liu Song Dynasty.[201] The white turtle dove allegedly appeared in the reign of King Tang of the Shang Dynasty 商湯王 (around 1675-1646 BCE), and it also reappeared twice.[202] Each time the white turtle dove appeared, waves of officials submitted praise-filled papers, as well as long exquisite poems, to express their admiration for the emperor. In these writings it was argued that Heaven was impressed with their emperor's virtue and thus white turtle doves came. In addition to the abovementioned birds, the *Songshu* also records the appearances of white pheasants (nine times) and white magpies (three times), without any explanation of why these birds were considered auspicious

(4) The last group of portents consists of the appearance of various auspicious plants. In my view, two of them, *jiahe* 嘉禾 and *mulianli* 木連理, possessed immense significance.

Jiahe was an auspicious kind of millet, in which each stalk had more than one ear. Traditional China was an agricultural society and the auspicious portents of millet – one of the most important cereals at that time – received the most attention. The *Songshu* asserts that the auspicious millet emerges only when a sage ruler diffuses his great virtue and significantly benefits his people.[203] The *Songshu* recorded this auspicious portent 40 times, principally during the reign of Emperor Wen of the Liu Song Dynasty.[204] Since 445, increasing amounts of auspicious millet had emerged, which greatly delighted the emperor, and he consequently declared a national amnesty.[205] On August the 8th 447, Mei Daonian 梅道念 (5th century), "the Director of Imperial Garden" (*yuanchen* 園丞), reported that auspicious millet appeared in the

[199] Ibid., 28.813.
[200] Ibid., 28.812.
[201] Ibid., 29.839.
[202] Ibid., 29.848.
[203] Ibid., 29.827.
[204] Ibid., 29.828-33.
[205] Ibid., 29.829. The edict for the national amnesty from Emperor Wen of the Liu Song still exists. See Xu Jingzong 許敬宗, *Wenguan cilin* 文館詞林 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 309.

Hulin Garden 華林園.[206] Two confidants of the emperor, Liu Yigong 劉義恭 (413-465) and Shen Yanzhi 沈演之 (397- 449), submitted exquisite prose to the court, which proclaimed that their emperor's great virtue was the cause of the appearance of auspicious millet.[207]

Mulianli describes two (or more) branches from two adjacent trees tangling and uniting into one branch. The *Songshu* argues that this portent appears only when the monarch is capable of uniting the "eight directions" (*bafang* 八方, i.e. the whole world) by his virtue.[208] The Liu Song Dynasty recorded more than 50 appearances of this portent.[209]

The *Songshu* also records other propitious plants, such as the lotus (two lotus blooms on one stalk, 21 appearances) and auspicious melons (one vine yields more than one melon, three appearances).[210]

In short, the manifold omens mentioned in this section served as important sources of legitimacy for the Liu Song Dynasty, as well as other Southern Dynasties. Some portents, such as the appearances of a dragon or sweet dew, directly indicated that the reigning ruler was legitimate. Others, such as the appearance of various white animals and birds, confirmed the ruler's virtue, thereby indirectly supporting his legitimacy. That is why the Liu Song Dynasty carefully recorded the witness, date, and location of these appearances, as the auspicious millet case indicates. Nevertheless, auspicious portents were still insufficient to prove the Southern Dynasties as the legitimate ruler of the central realm. One urgent issue for them was to secure and repair their lost geographical legitimacy, which is the focus of the next section.

2.2.3 Capital City and "Immigrant Commanderies"

According to the doctrine of All Under Heaven, the central realm is the center of the world, as well as the cradle of Chinese civilization. Occupation of the central realm thus served as a significant criterion to judge legitimacy, as mentioned in the

[206] *SS*, 29.829.
[207] Ibid., 29.829-830. Liu Yigong served as "Defender-in-chief" (*taiwei* 太尉) while Shen Yanzhi served as "Capital Commandant" (*zhonglingjun* 中領軍).
[208] Ibid., 29.853.
[209] Ibid., 29.857-60.
[210] Ibid., 29.83-35.

introduction. This eventually became, to some extent, a *sine qua non* for Chinese dynasties.

Being constrained in the southern half of what is now China, an area that in those days was to some extent still considered "barbaric,"[211] the Southern Dynasties failed to meet the geographical criterion of legitimacy. While many of these dynasties launched waves of military campaigns against their powerful northern opponents, all were unsuccessful. Therefore, the Southern Dynasties made use of factors other than the occupation of the central realm to supplement their geographical legitimacy. In this section two major relevant factors are investigated: (1) the new capital Jiankang, and (2) the creation of "immigrant commanderies."

(1) The Eastern Jin and subsequent Southern Dynasties defined themselves as the successors of the Western Jin. Apparently, this idea could be supported by the fact that they inhabited the same capital, namely Luoyang, as the Western Jin. Although Luoyang was primarily occupied by various "barbarian" dynasties after the Western Jin collapsed, many elites of the Eastern Jin still viewed this city as the rightful capital and they planned to transfer their capital city there. In 362, Huan Wen, a powerful general of the Eastern Jin, occupied Luoyang and eagerly suggested that the Eastern Jin transfer its capital to that city.[212] This idea was rejected, however, since one official, Sun Chuo 孫綽 (314-371), stressed that Luoyang was surrounded by a great number of "barbarians" and was in ruins.[213] Something similar happened in 417 when another general, Liu Yu, reoccupied Luoyang and also suggested a transfer of the capital.[214] This proposal also came to nothing because Liu Yu soon returned to Jiankang and devoted all his attention to his planned usurpation. Soon after that, the Northern Wei occupied Luoyang and finally made this city their capital at the end of the fifth century, which meant that the Southern Dynasties forever lost the opportunity to make this city their capital.[215] The above two cases vividly indicate that Luoyang was viewed as the rightful capital city, even by the Southern Dynasties.

In addition to the two above proposals to reoccupy Luoyang, the Eastern Jin and the subsequent Southern Dynasties validated their geographical legitimacy by

[211] As will be described in Section 3.1.1, Wei Shou suggested that some Chinese people in his day even viewed southern China as a "barbarian" area.
[212] *JS*, 98.2572-74.
[213] Ibid., 56.1546-47. Sun Chuo suggested a delayed transfer until the Eastern Jin had totally defeated these nearby northern "barbarians" and restored the central realm. His suggestion was implemented.
[214] *SS*, 46.1292.
[215] *WS*, 31.736.

alluding to an ancient prophecy to demonstrate that their new capital, Jiankang, was a suitable capital city. A series of events that happened in 329 provides some clues.

In 329, the Eastern Jin suppressed a rebellion launched by an ambitious general, Su Jun 蘇峻 (?-328).[216] In the course of this rebellion the capital, Jiankang, was destroyed and officials then discussed founding a new capital in Yuzhang 豫章 (present-day Nanchang 南昌) or Kuaiji 會稽 (present-day Suzhou 蘇州).[217] "The Minister over the Masses" (*situ* 司徒), Wang Dao 王導 (276-339), objected to this idea, however, and insisted on retaining Jiankang as the capital. His most important argument was a saying of the time that Jiankang was "the residence of emperors" (*dili* 帝里).[218] Wang Dao's idea prevailed and Jiankang remained the capital for all later Southern Dynasties. This begs an interesting question: what made Jiankang acceptable as the capital for the Eastern Jin and the Southern Dynasties?

The *Jinshu* 晉書 (History of the Jin Dynasty) offers us some answers. When arguing for the valid status of Emperor Yuan 元帝 (r. 318-323), the first emperor of the Eastern Jin, the *Jinshu* introduced an ancient prophecy concerning Jiankang. The *Jinshu* states that during the Qin Dynasty a prophet observed the geomantic omen of Jinling 金陵 (the original name of Jiankang) and prophesized that "after five hundred years, Jinling will have the 'air' (*qi* 氣) of the Son of Heaven." 五百年後金陵有天子氣.[219] This prophecy directly predicted that a legitimate monarch would appear in Jinling five centuries later. The First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty disliked this prophecy and, to invalidate it, changed the name of Jinling to Moling 秣陵 and ordered the digging of the northern hill of Jinling to destroy its geomantic shape.[220] In 229 CE (that is, 450 years after the Qin Dynasty was established), the Sun Wu Dynasty 孫吳 (229–280) was founded. This dynasty chose Moling (which was soon renamed Jianye 建業) as its capital to fulfill that prophecy and thereby support its

[216] *JS*, 100.2628-31.
[217] Ibid., 65.1751.
[218] The official history of the Sun Wu also notes the same saying. See *SGZ*, 53.1246. Wang Dao also mentioned that both Sun Quan 孫權 (182-252) and Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223), the founders of the Sun Wu Dynasty (229-280) and the Shu Han Dynasty (221-263) respectively, agreed with that saying.
[219] *JS*, 6.157. The *Shiji* records another slightly different version, which only says the *qi* of Son of Heaven appeared in Southeast China. The *Shiji* also mentions that the First Emperor disliked this prophecy and avoided coming to that area. Since the founder of the Western Han Dynasty, Liu Bang 劉邦, or Emperor Gaozu of Han (202-195 BCE), was born in Southeast China, people in the Western Han period cited the former prophecy to prove that their ruler was the Son of Heaven. See *Shiji*,8.238.
[220] *JS*, 6.157.

legitimacy.[221] In 317, the Eastern Jin was founded and made the same city its capital (the Western Jin had changed the name Jianye to Jiankang four years earlier).[222] Similarly to the Sun Wu Dynasty, the Eastern Jin also cited that same antique prophecy to support its legitimacy. As the *Jinshu* describes, the Eastern Jin officials argued that their emperor was the truly legitimate one since their dynasty was established just 538 years after the Qin Dynasty was founded, which corresponded more closely – in comparison to the Sun Wu Dynasty – to the prophecy.[223] The abovementioned Wang Dao also referred to that prophecy in his attempt to validate Jiankang as the rightful capital. In other words, although Jiankang had less merit in terms of providing legitimacy than Luoyang, the ancient prophecy gave this city some legitimacy. Sharing a similar view, Lewis argues that Jiankang was "bereft of the classical authority of the northern capitals" and "turned to the marginal arts of geomancy and the reading of *qi*, and drew its sacred power entirely from the surrounding landscape."[224] That is why Jiankang remained the capital for all ensuing Southern Dynasties and why they reiterated that prophecy to "prove" the validity of their rulers, who resided in the "imperial residence" of Jiankang.

(2) The Southern Dynasties also enhanced their geographical legitimacy by establishing massive "immigrant commanderies" (*qiaojun* 僑郡) to represent their symbolic occupation of the whole central realm. Some clues about the function of the immigrant commanderies can be found in the *Weishu*. As its records, Vice Director (*zhongshu shilang* 中書侍郎) Han Xianzong 韓顯宗 (466-499), a confidant of Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei, once told his emperor that:

> Ever since the illegitimate Southern Dynasties [started to] continually succeed one another, they annexed the area north of the Huai River and wanted to arrogate the name of *zhonghua*. [These dynasties] induced our frontier people

[221] *SGZ*, 53.1246. Jianye 建業 literally means "to establish one's work," indicating the establishment of a rightful rule.
[222] In 282, the Western Jin renamed this city Jianye 建鄴. In 313, since Ye 鄴 became a taboo word (the name of the emperor of the time had a "Ye" in it), this city was renamed Jiankang. See *JS*, 15.460. This name was retained throughout the Southern Dynasties period. For a thorough study of the practice of tabooing names in Chinese history, see Piotr Adamek, *A Good Son is Sad If He Hears the Name of His Father: The Tabooing of Names in China as a Way of Implementing Social Values* (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2015). The "Chronological Index of Taboo Names of Emperors and Other Famous Persons" in Adamek's work notes that "Ye" was a taboo word in the Eastern Jin period.
[223] *JS*, 6.157.
[224] Lewis, *China Between Empires*, 26.

[to move southwards], and set up commanderies and districts in the style of the central realm in their places [with the same name]. After our glorious winds blew south, [the Southern Dynasties] still kept [these place names] without changing. There are a great number of places [commanderies and districts] that shared the same name.

自南偽相承，竊有淮北，欲擅中華之稱。且以招誘邊民，故僑置中州郡縣。自皇風南被，仍而不改。凡有重名，其數甚眾。[225]

Han Xianzong noted three striking features of the immigrant commanderies. Firstly, they adopted the name of the original commanderies in the North China Plain.[226] This is remarkable because, even though dynasties came and went, a large number of the lower level administrative units in Chinese history usually preserved their geographical boundaries and names. However, in the Period of Disunion, a great deal of similarly named provinces (*zhou* 州), commanderies (*jun* 郡) or districts (*xian* 縣) appeared in the south of China. That is to say, many of the administrative units not only existed in their regular location, the North China Plain, but also had a "replica" in the south. For instance, Wei Commandery 魏郡 was a historical commandery situated in northern China. The Eastern Jin created a new Wei Commandery, which was located close to Jiankang.[227] In fact, more than one-third of all commanderies and districts in the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the Liu Song Dynasty had "prototypes" on northern Chinese soil, as present-day scholar Hu Axiang 胡阿祥 points out.[228]

Secondly, the purpose of establishing immigrant commanderies was to borrow geographical legitimacy, or, in Han Xianzong's words, the Southern Dynasties "wanted to arrogate the name of *zhonghua*." Originally, there had been practical reasons for the creation of immigrant commanderies. From the late Western Jin Dynasty, waves of Chinese refugees fled to southern China as "barbarian" troops

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[225] *WS*, 60.1342. *Zhongzhou* 中州 is a synonym for the central realm in Chinese history.

[226] In some cases, the Southern Dynasties added adjectives such as "south" 南 to distinguish the immigrant provinces from their "prototypes." For instance, there had been a Xu Province 徐州 in the central realm for centuries. The Liu Song Dynasty, however, established the immigrant South Xu Province 南徐州 near their capital Jiankang. See Hu Axiang, "Liuchao jiangyu yu zhengqu shulun 六朝疆域與政區述論," *Nanjing ligong daxue xuebao* 南京理工大學學報 16 (2003): 14.

[227] *SS*, 35.1029.

[228] Hu Axiang, "Liuchao jiangyu," 12-14. Similar studies see Jing Youquan 景有泉, "Dongjin Nanbeichao shiqi qiaozhou junxian de shezhi jiqi lishi zuoyong 東晉南朝時期僑州郡縣的設置及其歷史作用," *Dongbei shida xuebao* 東北師大學報 2(1987): 37-42.

wreaked havoc on northern China. In many cases, people from a town or village would gather together to support each other during the long journey to the south, leaving their empty hometowns behind. The Eastern Jin Dynasty described refugees from the north as immigrants (*qiaoren* 僑人) and settled them in corresponding immigrant commanderies (or districts), each named after the immigrants' hometown. The first immigrant district was established in 329.[229] Thereafter, an increasing number emerged.[230] In time, the Southern Dynasties gradually copied most of the commanderies of northern China in the south of China. The Eastern Jin Dynasty had 23 immigrant provinces and 253 immigrant commanderies in 418. In the Liang Dynasty, these figures had increased to 109 and 405 respectively, indicating that many of the later immigrant commanderies did not serve to settle immigrants, since Northern China at that time remained relatively peaceful.[231] The real purpose rested upon the fact that the Southern Dynasties intentionally established immigrant commanderies to create a symbolic central realm – practically occupying southern China's territory and symbolically dominating northern China's territory, thereby demonstrating their geographical legitimacy.

The third feature of immigrant commanderies was that they initially harbored exiles from northern China. It was well known in ancient China, and it is explicitly mentioned in the *Songshu*, that a virtuous and legitimate dynasty would attract people from elsewhere, whereas tyrannical dynasties would force their subjects to flee.[232] The coming of northern people would hence indicate that the Southern Dynasties were more virtuous and legitimate than the Northern Wei.

From the late Eastern Jin Dynasty, people with immigrant status gradually turned into ordinary citizens, and immigrant commanderies turned into normal towns. However, the names of these commanderies were largely preserved as a kind of placebo for the Southern dynasties as part of their pursuit of geographical legitimacy.

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[229] Wang Zhongluo, *Wei Jin nanbeichao shi*, 324.
[230] *SS*, 11.205. The *Songshu* claims that both the government and immigrants hoped to return to their homelands. One of the purposes of establishing the immigrant commanderies, it states, was to express the Southern Dynasties' aspiration to reoccupy the central realm.
[231] Hu Axiang, "Liuchao Jiangyu," 14.
[232] *SS*, 95.2338-39.

2.2.4 Diplomacy

Like the Northern Wei, the Southern Dynasties also attempted to advance their supreme status in the diplomatic field. In this section, four periods in which the Southern Dynasties applied distinct methods to demonstrate their supreme status are distinguished.

(1) The Eastern Jin received their supreme status directly from the Western Jin. On the eve of the Western Jin's collapse, the last ruler, Emperor Min 晉湣帝 (r. 313-316), issued an edict granting the throne to his second cousin, Sima Rui.[233] As the historical records show, most of the remaining power holders of the Western Jin Dynasty declared their support for this edict.[234] Therefore, Sima Rui ascended the throne in Jiankang and became the first emperor of the Eastern Jin. As the successor of the Western Jin, the Eastern Jin maintained its supreme status in the diplomatic field, which can be demonstrated from two perspectives. Firstly, most of the northern "barbarian" dynasties viewed the Eastern Jin Dynasty as superior and rightful rulers. Many of them, such as the Former Yan and the Former Liang, served as nominal vassals of the Eastern Jin. Even the mighty states that occupied northern China hesitated to challenge the Eastern Jin's supreme status. For example, when Fu Jian 苻堅 (338-385), the ruler of the Former Qin (350-394), was in the process of planning to conquer the Eastern Jin Dynasty (after he had annexed northern China), his brother Fu Rong 苻融 (?-383), who disagreed with this campaign, according to the *Jinshu* supposedly said:

> (Our) state and families consist of barbarian clans and the legitimacy does not belong to [our] people. Jiangdong [i.e. the Eastern Jin], although it is hanging by a thread [i.e. became weak], is still blessed by Heaven and thus cannot be conquered.
> 且國家，戎族也，正朔會不歸人。江東雖不絕如綖，然天之所相，終不可滅。[235]

[233] *JS*, 6.143-44.
[234] Ibid., 6.145-48.
[235] Ibid., 114.2935.

Secondly, the Eastern Jin firmly protected its supreme status and adamantly refused to treat any other state as equal. For example, the Later Zhao (319-352), which temporarily ruled most areas of northern China, once sent an envoy to the Eastern Jin expecting to formulate an equal diplomatic relationship. To protect its supreme status, the Eastern Jin burned the diplomatic gifts and expelled the envoy.[236]

(2) In the second stage, the Liu Song Dynasty encountered a powerful challenger to its supreme status, the Northern Wei. This non-Chinese dynasty was more ambitious than the previous "barbarian" states. In pursuit of supreme status, the Northern Wei directly competed with the Southern Dynasties in the diplomatic field and increased its advantage by means of its military superiority. The following diplomatic dispute, in my view, signals the beginning of this competition.

Qiuchi 仇池 (385-442) was a small mountainous northwestern non-Chinese state and it had served as a wavering vassal state to both the Northern Wei and the Liu Song Dynasty.[237] To win over this vassal, the Northern Wei applied various diplomatic means, such as granting the Qiuchi king an official title, greatly rewarding their tribute, arranging intermarriages with the Qiuchi ruling house, and asking the Qiuchi state to send its princes as hostages.[238] This wavering vassal gradually turned to the Northern Wei and launched a substantial military assault on the Liu Song Dynasty in 433.[239] To win over this state, the *Songshu* records that the Liu Song Dynasty "generously" forgave Qiuchi's invasion after it withdrew its troops and submitted a "sincere" apology.[240] However, when the Qiuchi boldly launched another invasion in 442, the Liu Song reacted with a rapid and powerful counterattack and soon occupied all Qiuchi land.[241] The Liu Song Dynasty clearly acknowledged that Qiuchi was also the vassal of the Northern Wei, but it still reacted with a well-prepared counterattack,

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[236] Ibid., 7.177. Another reason for that fierce reaction might be the fact that Shi Le significantly contributed to the collapse of the Western Jin. David Honey shows that Shi Le cited prophetic sayings to enhance his legitimacy. See David B. Honey, "Lineage as Legitimation in the Rise of Liu Yüan and Shih Le," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110.4 (1990): 616-621.

[237] For a further study of the Qiuchi state, see Xu Rihui 徐日輝, *Qinzhou shidi* 秦州史地 (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin meishu chubanshe, 1994), 177-241. Hu Xiaopeng 胡小鵬, "Qiuchi dizu yangshi zhengquan qiantan 仇池氐族楊氏政權淺探," *Xibei daxue xuebao* 西北師大學報 3(1987): 88-92.

[238] *WS*, 101.2230.

[239] *SS*, 98.2406-07. The Northern Wei possibly offered some secret support. The *Weishu* notes that the Qiuchi had sent the spoils of seventy hundred imprisoned families to the Northern Wei. It then records that the Northern Wei soon promoted the ruler of Qiuchi to King of Nanqin 南秦王. See *WS*, 4.83, 101.2230.

[240] *SS*, 98.2407.

[241] Ibid., 98.2408-09.

which clearly served as a warning to the Northern Wei for luring the Liu Song's vassal.

The Northern Wei quickly intervened and sent a fierce diplomatic protest to the Liu Song Dynasty.[242] In this protest it was pointed out that Qiuchi was a loyal vassal of the Northern Wei, and criticized the Liu Song Dynasty's impudent invasion of its vassal. It said the Liu Song Dynasty's actions had already challenged the Northern Wei's supreme status and ended with a commitment to revive the Qiuchi.[243] The Liu Song Dynasty promptly sent a strongly worded reply.[244] It stressed that Qiuchi had long served as a vassal of the Eastern Jin as well as the Liu Song Dynasty, not of the Northern Wei.[245] It furthermore argued the Northern Wei had also illegally invaded vassal states of the Liu Song, such as the Northern Yan and Northern Liang, without any advance negotiations.

This diplomatic dispute was subsequently resolved on the battlefield. Being ill-prepared for a massive military confrontation, both sides restricted operations to within the Qiuchi area. The militarily superior Northern Wei defeated the Liu Song army and occupied the northern half of the Qiuchi's land. Thereafter, both sides established a series of puppet states to rule this area.

This diplomatic dispute was a result of various declarations of supreme status, with both the Northern Wei and the Liu Song Dynasty striving to gain the support of each other's vassals so as to manifest their supreme status and further support their legitimacy. This led them to turn a diplomatic dispute into a military confrontation.

The competition for legitimacy intensified thereafter and the Liu Song Dynasty employed various methods to win over vassals of the Northern Wei.

Take the Gaogouli as an example. Similarly to the Northern Wei, the Liu Song offered every Gaogouli ruler an official title. It is remarkable that the Liu Song and all later Southern Dynasties adopted a policy that later scholars would refer to as "empty appointments" (*xufeng* 虛封), which entitled these vassals to rule some territory of the Northern Wei.[246] For example, Pingzhou 平州 and Yingzhou 營州, two frontier provinces of the Northern Wei, were situated close to the Gaogouli area. In 430 and

[242] Ibid., 95.2334-36.
[243] Ibid., 95.2336.
[244] Ibid..
[245] Ibid. 95.2337.
[246] Further studies see Hu Axiang, "Weijin nanbeichao zhi yaoling yu xufeng shulun 魏晉南北朝之遙領與虛封述論," *Nanjing shida xuebao* 南京師大學報 5(2011): 47-53.

433, the Liu Song appointed the ruler of Gaogouli to administer these two provinces.[247] From the Liu Song's perspective, the appointment was valid since this dynasty had declared itself the legitimate ruler of the central realm. However, the Northern Wei firmly dominated Pingzhou and Yingzhou, effectively rendering the appointments made by the Liu Song invalid. Although the Gaogouli could not fight the Northern Wei for these lands as the Liu Song Dynasty possibly expected, it was still satisfied with that kind of appointment, as the historical records indicate. Therefore, the Gaogouli, allegedly the most loyal vassal of the Northern Wei, maintained diplomatic interaction with the Liu Song Dynasty and other Southern Dynasties.[248]

The competition for supreme status reached new heights in the mid-fifth century CE, when both the Northern Wei and the Liu Song Dynasty launched waves of attacks against each other in the hope of unifying the central realm. In the early period, the Liu Song successfully formed an anti-Northern Wei alliance, which included the Rouran, the Northern Yan, and some vassals of the Northern Wei, Gaogouli, Tuyuhun, and the Later Liang.[249] However, the Northern Wei destroyed this alliance (it defeated the Rouran and the Tuyuhun, suppressed the Gaogouli and occupied all other members' lands). The Liu Song Dynasty also suffered a catastrophic defeat in 450. Thereafter, the two sides declared peace, which lasted for nearly half a century.[250]

(3) The peace between the Liu Song and Northern Wei marks the beginning of the third stage. The basic consensus for this peaceful stage rested upon the mutual affirmation of each other's supreme status to some extent and a tacit admission of the equal status of the other.[251] A relevant diplomatic dispute in the early Southern Qi Dynasty vividly demonstrates this situation.

In 489, the Northern Wei invited Southern Qi envoys to attend an official banquet. The Northern Wei officials seated the envoys from both the Southern Qi and

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[247] Ibid., 97.2392.
[248] Jiang Weigong 姜維公, "Nanchao yu Beichao dui Gaogouli zhengce de bijiao yanjiu 南朝與北朝對高句麗政策的比較研究," *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi Yanjiu* 中國邊疆史地研究 4(2014):14-22.
[249] *SS*, 95.2337.
[250] *WS*, 4.105.
[251] Similar situations also occurred in later periods. Whether the Northern Song and Liao Dynasty, or the Southern Song and Jin dynasties, or the PRC and ROC of the last half-century, all declared their legitimate right to rule the central realm (or China) but meanwhile tacitly admitted that the other dynasty had some kind of partial legitimacy. David Curtis Wright notes that a similar situation existed between the Northern Song and the Liao Dynasty. See David Curtis Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh-Century China: Sung's Foreign Relations with Khitan Liao* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 7-38.

the Gaogouli at the first table, with the former seated at the front. However, the envoys from the Southern Qi strongly protested this arrangement. As they pointed out:

> We carried the mission from our great state and came to visit your state. The only counterpart [of our state] is your Wei state. All these barbarians have no right to sit close to us. What is more, the small Mo state from an eastern barbarous land [i.e. the Gaogouli state] has subjected itself to our state. How dare its envoys sit next to us [at the same table]?!
> 我等銜命上華，來造卿國。所為抗敵，在乎一魏。自餘外夷，理不得望我鑣塵。況東夷小貊，臣屬朝廷，今日乃敢與我躡踵！[252]

The Southern Qi envoys continued that they always offered the first and sole position to the Northern Wei envoys, indicating that no other state was comparable to the Northern Wei except the Southern Qi itself.[253] There are no further records of this diplomatic dispute, but the above episode suggests that the Southern Qi admitted that the Northern Wei were their equals and no longer an inferior "barbarian" state.

(4) The peaceful age ended at the end of the fifth century. This time, the Northern Wei took the initiative. Emperor Xiaowen attacked the Southern Qi soon after he transferred the capital to Luoyang. The Southern Qi and ensuing Liang Dynasty withstood these attacks over the next few decades. There was little diplomatic contact between the north and south. Only in the Eastern Wei period did the north and south cease the war and engage in diplomatic relations. However, the north soon recovered and restarted its unification campaign. Finally, in 589, the last southern dynasty was conquered by the Sui Dynasty, which unified China and ended the Period of Division.

In short, this section comprised a description of how the Southern Dynasties attempted to maintain their supreme status in the diplomatic field in different periods. In the first period, the Eastern Jin's supreme status was accepted by most contemporaneous states. In the second period, the Liu Song Dynasty had to compete with the Northern Wei for the supreme status. The Liu Song Dynasty not only employed means such as offering official titles and the "empty appointments" to win over its vassals, but also formed an anti-Northern Wei alliance to fight against its

[252] *NQS*, 39.1009.
[253] Ibid., 39.1010.

northern peer. In the third period, the Liu Song and the Southern Qi strove to maintain a partial supreme status since they acknowledged the equal rank of the Northern Wei. Finally, from the end of the fifth century, the Southern Qi and the Liang were forced to engage in war with the Northern Wei until their northern peer collapsed in 535.

2.3 Conclusion

The "contest for legitimacy" between the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties was rather complex, as this chapter demonstrates. It seems that the two regimes approached the issue of their legitimacy in differing ways. The Northern Wei gradually established its legitimacy from scratch, while the Southern Dynasties strove to preserve their decaying legitimacy. Thus, which side was indeed the qualified legitimate ruler of the central realm?

The Northern Wei had few means of supporting its legitimacy claims in its early period. To legitimize its establishment, this dynasty tried to highlight its close historical connection with the Cao Wei. Both the new dynastic name of Wei and the dynastic phase of Earth, which relate to the historical criterion of legitimacy, were used to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Cao Wei. In its middle period especially during the reign of Emperor Xiaowen, the Northern Wei enhanced their legitimacy in various ways. This dynasty adopted the new dynastic phase of Metal, transferred its capital to Luoyang, and appealed to the virtue of filial piety and adopted Chinese-style state ceremonies. With reference to historical, geographical and ethnic legitimacy criteria, the above practices demonstrated the Northern Wei's historical link to the Western Jin, symbolized this dynasty's occupation of the central realm, and highlighted this dynasty's adoption of Chinese culture, which apparently improved the Northern Wei's legitimacy. Besides, the Northern Wei also showed itself to be the legitimate ruler of the central realm by establishing its supreme status in the diplomatic field. Nevertheless, this dynasty failed to attain full legitimacy. Until it collapsed in the mid-sixth century, this dynasty could not unite the central realm or defeat the challenger to its legitimate status.

The Eastern Jin and subsequent Southern Dynasties inherited several means of substantiating their legitimacy from their predecessors. However, their relatively weak power continued to undermine their legitimate status. To preserve their legitimacy, these dynasties used abdication methods with complex procedures to establish their

rulership, which not only met the moral criterion of legitimacy by highlighting the great virtue of the founders of these dynasties, but also the historical criterion by expressing these dynasties' close historical links with their predecessors. The Southern Dynasties also noted diverse auspicious portents to signify their blessing from Heaven, which was in accordance with the cosmological criterion. Moreover, the Southern Dynasties cited the prophecy related to their capital, Jiankang, and established immigrant commanderies to manifest their possession of the central realm, in order to enhance their legitimacy in relation to the geographical criterion of legitimacy. Finally, the Southern Dynasties also competed with the Northern Wei for supreme status in the diplomatic field. However, the Southern Dynasties also failed to attain full legitimacy. These dynasties could not halt the rise of the Northern Wei and were finally conquered by the successor of the Northern Wei, the Sui.

Apparently, both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties failed to become *primus inter pares* and attain full legitimacy. There therefore seems to be no answer to the question of which side was truly legitimate. However, it seems that most dynasties after the Period of Disunion officially accepted the Northern Wei's legitimacy. As indicated above, the selection of an official dynastic phase could tell us how a later dynasty determined its legitimate predecessor. The permutations of official dynastic phases in Chinese history proceeded in the following two sequences:

Chart 2. Two Permutations of Official Dynastic Phases in Chinese History

1	Qin (Water) →Han (Fire)[254] → Cao Wei (Earth) → Jin (Metal) → Liu Song (Water) → Southern Qi and Liang (Wood) → Chen (Fire)[255]
2	Northern Wei (Water) → Northern Zhou (Wood) → Sui (Fire) → Tang (Earth)[256] → Five Dynasties (Mental—Water—Wood) → Song (Fire)[257]

[254] The Han Dynasty adopted three dynastic phases: the Water Phase in the reign of Emperor Gaozu, the Earth Phase in the reign of Emperor Wu 漢武帝 (r. 141-87 BCE) and the Fire Phase from Emperor Guangwu 漢光武帝 (r. 25-57).

[255] No dynasties claimed succession in the subsequent dynastic phase from the Chen Dynasty.

[256] The Tang Dynasty had adopted three dynastic phases: Earth in the reign of Emperor Gaozu 唐高祖 (r. 618-626), Fire in the reign of Empress Wu 武皇后 (r. 690-705), and Earth from the Emperor Zhongzong 唐中宗 (r. 684, 705-710).

[257] Dynasties after the Song seldom assigned themselves an official dynastic phase. See Liu Pujiang, "The End of the Five Virtues," 513-54.

The first sequence begins with the Qin and ends with the Chen Dynasty, the last southern dynasty. The Northern Wei initiated the second sequence, which was succeeded by virtually all later Chinese dynasties. In other words, most Chinese dynasties after the Northern Wei derived their dynastic phases from it, which indicates their support for the Northern Wei, rather than the Southern Dynasties.

Interestingly, scholars throughout Chinese history have diverse views on this "contest for legitimacy." In the following three chapters, scholars' relevant ideas will be closely examined and the complexity of traditional Chinese opinions about legitimacy will be unveiled.