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

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Chapter 5. Later Views on the Legitimacy of the Northern Wei

The discussion about the Northern Wei's legitimacy did not fade with time and, indeed, continued to receive much attention from the Song Dynasty onwards. In this chapter five groups of scholars who can be seen as representative due to their innovative or influential ideas regarding the dispute are identified. First three groups of Song Dynasty scholars will be discussed: advocates of the Northern Wei's legitimacy (Zhang Fangping and Chen Shidao), opponents of its legitimacy (Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang), and an opponent of the legitimacy of both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties (Zheng Sixiao). Two groups of scholars subsequent to the Song Dynasty will also be examined: those who objected to the Northern Wei's legitimacy on the grounds of Neo-Confucianism (Fang Xiaoru), and those who deconstructed the term *zhengtong* and objected to the legitimacy of both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties (Wang Fuzhi and Liang Qichao). The questions to be addressed are as follows: What are these scholars' distinct views on the legitimacy of the Northern Wei? What motivates their views? Why do their views vary from one to another?

5.1 Views in the Song Dynasty

The late tenth century witnessed the rise of what is often seen as a civilized and prosperous Chinese power, the Northern Song Dynasty. As McNeill asserts, during the Song Dynasty "China swiftly became by far the richest, most skilled, and most populous country on earth."[1] Although this dynasty suffered increasingly severe military threats from northern non-Chinese dynasties—the Khitan Liao and Tangut Western Xia Dynasty 西夏 (1038-1227)—and failed to take the northern frontier of China from the Khitan people, it claimed its legitimate rulership over the central

[1] William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 50. Note that both Northern Song and Southern Song were simply called Song. Later scholars added the prefix "Northern" to refer to the first period of the Song, from 959, when the dynasty was established, to 1126 when it lost its capital city Kaifeng 開封 and fled to southern China. The prefix "Southern" was added to refer to the second period of the Song, from 1126, when the Song Dynasty in exile established itself in its capital Lin'an (present-day Hangzhou), to 1279, when the Yuan Dynasty conquered the Song Dynasty.

realm.[2] Apparently, both the Liao and Western Xia were not willing to accept the Northern Song's supreme status. This somewhat resembles the Northern Wei situation, which also resulted in a "contest" for legitimate status, or *zhengtong*, between non-Chinese and Chinese dynasties. In my view, this partially explains why Northern Song scholars were interested in the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute. In this section, two groups of Northern Song scholars who provided influential views concerning the legitimacy of the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties will be discussed.

In 1127, the Northern Song was toppled by the Jurchen Jin Dynasty.[3] The exiled Song court re-established its rule in the south of China. Compared with its northern peers, the Southern Song was a much weaker military power. It continued to identify itself as the legitimate continuation of the Northern Song, although it had lost northern China and was forced to treat the Jin as equal.[4] The Jin and subsequent Mongolian Yuan rapidly occupied many areas of the central realm and adopted various legitimization methods, as Hok-lam Chan, Rogers and Herbert Franke point out, to prove themselves the legitimate rulers of the central realm.[5] As the situation with the non-Chinese Jurchen and Mongolians in the north and the Chinese Song in the south resembled the earlier situation of the non-Chinese Northern Wei and the Chinese Southern Dynasties, scholars in the Southern Song court also paid attention to the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute.[6] One typical representative, Zheng Sixiao, who indirectly supported his dynasty's legitimacy by denying the legitimate status of the Northern Wei, will also be studied.

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[2] Concerning the general discussion about the relations between the Northern Song and its northern peers, see Twitchett and Fairbank eds., *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 5, The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907-1279* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 14, 20-28. In fact, the Northern Song officially admitted the Liao Dynasty to be an equal regime, or at least a similarly legitimate dynasty. This is quite similar to the situation between the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties, as discussed in Chapter 2.

[3] Twitchett and Fairbank eds., *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 5,* 644-50.

[4] Ibid., 650-652. 677-84.

[5] On how the Jin and Yuan dynasties legitimated their rule, see Hok-lam Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China*; Franke, *From Tribal Chieftain*.

[6] Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 44-49.

5.1.1 The Northern Wei is Legitimate

During the Northern Song, scholars paid much attention to Wang Tong.[7] Several of them shared his interest in the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute. Zhang Fangping and Chen Shidao, for instance, furthered Wang Tong's views in discussing legitimacy.

5.1.1.1 Zhang Fangping

Zhang Fangping was a high-ranking official in the early Northern Song court who once served as a "Participant in Determining Governmental Matters" (*canzhi zhengshi* 參知政事), the dynasty's approximation of a vice-prime minister.[8] He left an essay entitled "Nanbei zhengrun lun" 南北正閏論 (Discourse on the Legitimacy or Illegitimacy of the Northern and Southern Dynasties).[9] In it, he discusses the question of why the Northern Wei was legitimate while the Southern Dynasties were not, and investigates how the Northern Wei established their legitimacy.

The essay begins with the assumption that the Northern Wei, rather than the Eastern Jin, was a legitimate dynasty.[10] Zhang mentions that some Northern Song thinkers might disagree with that assumption, since they viewed the Eastern Jin Dynasty as the successor of the supposedly legitimate Western Jin, while the Northern Wei, in their view, was a "barbarian" dynasty with no convincing evidence of its legitimacy.

To defend his assumption, Zhang Fangping argues that the Eastern Jin could not have been the legitimate successors of the Western Jin.[11] He mentions that in Chinese history, a number of rulers, such King Pan'geng 盤庚 of the Shang Dynasty (around 1300 BCE) and King Ping of the Zhou Dynasty 周平王 (r. 770-720 BCE), had transferred their capital cities to prolong or ensure their dominance.[12] In those cases, the transfer of capital cities did not indicate the establishment of a different dynasty and scholars in later periods still viewed King Pan'geng and King Ping as the legitimate successors of their ancestors' dynasties. Shen Yue and Huangfu Shi, for

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[7] Li Xiaocheng, *Wenzhongzi*, 4-9.
[8] The *Songshi* 宋史 (History of the Song Dynasty) includes a biography of Zhang Fangping, see Tuotuo 脫脫 et al. comps., *Songshi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 318.10353-59.
[9] This essay is included in Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 91-92.
[10] Ibid., 91.
[11] Ibid.
[12] King Pan'geng transferred the capital from Yan 奄 (near present-day Qufu 曲阜) to Yin 殷 (near present-day Anyang 安陽). King Ping moved the capital from Gaojing 鎬京 (near present-day Xi'an 西安) to Luoyi 雒邑 (now known as Luoyang 洛陽).

instance, had a similar view and depicted the Eastern Jin as the continuation of the Western Jin, albeit with a different capital. Zhang Fangping rejects this view, arguing that the Eastern Jin was a different case. The Eastern Jin, although being of the same royal family as the Western Jin, had lost the central realm as well as the Mandate of Heaven, which meant that this dynasty had failed to be the legitimate successor of the Western Jin.[13] Zhang continues by insisting that the Eastern Jin could not transfer non-existent legitimacy to the subsequent Southern Dynasties, each of which lasted only a short period and failed to acquire legitimate status.

Next, Zhang Fangping stresses that the non-Chinese ethnicity of Northern Wei rulers did not make their dynasty illegitimate. He makes an analogy, saying that two ancient kings, Yu of the Xia Dynasty and King Wen of the Western Zhou, are considered to have been two ideal rulers due to their great virtues, even though they supposedly came from "barbarian" tribes (*dongyi* 東夷 and *xiqiang* 西羌, respectively). [14] Zhang argues that this also applies to the Tuoba rulers of the Northern Wei. To support that argument, he cites four pieces of evidence of the Northern Wei's legitimacy, which derive from Wang Tong (sacrificing to Heaven, caring for the people, occupying the central realm, and adopting Confucian political principles).[15] Zhang argues that the Northern Wei's rulers were the same as King Yu and King Wen, and they should therefore be viewed as rightful due to their great merits and adoption of Confucian principles, regardless of their background.

The second part of Zhang Fangping's essay counters another refutation of the Northern Wei's legitimacy. The argument was that the predecessor of the Northern Wei, the Kingdom of Dai 代國 (315-376), did not possess the Mandate of Heaven, since this kingdom was subject to the Western Jin and did not occupy the central realm.[16] Lacking political legitimacy, the Kingdom of Dai would be unable to provide legitimacy to its successor, the Northern Wei.[17] To counter this refutation, Zhang Fangping suggests that, rather than receiving its predecessor's legitimacy, the Northern Wei gradually attained its legitimacy through different endeavors: it received the Mandate of Heaven when it occupied northern China, attained full legitimacy

[13] Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 91.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Early in 315, the Western Jin Dynasty granted the Tuoba ruler the title of King of Dai, initiating the Kingdom of Dai. This Kingdom finally grew into the Northern Wei Dynasty. See *WS*, 1.7-9.
[17] Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo Shixue*, 91.

when Emperor Xiaowen was enthroned, and maintained its exclusive legitimate status until it collapsed.[18] This argument is similar to what we saw in Wang Tong's *Yuanjing*.

Zhang Fangping continues by saying that the Northern Wei's dynastic phase correctly succeeded that of the Western Jin Dynasty, indicating that the Northern Wei inherited legitimacy from the Western Jin. One of the most questionable points with respect to this theme, as Zhang's essay indicates, is that the Western Jin could not be seen as the predecessors of the Northern Wei's dynastic phase, since the Tuoba Wei established itself a half century after the Western Jin collapsed. Zhang gets around this by mentioning a similar case, namely that the Western Han Dynasty (founded in 202 BCE) had bypassed the Qin Dynasty and adopted a dynastic phase generated by the Zhou Dynasty, which had perished many decades earlier (in 256 BCE).[19] Similarly, the Northern Wei could bypass intermediate dynasties and adopt the Water Phase, following the Western Jin's Metal Phase.[20] Thereupon, Zhang's essay provides a succession of legitimate dynasties that establishes the Northern Wei as the direct successor of the Western Jin.[21]

In conclusion, similarly to Wang Tong, Zhang Fangping defines legitimacy according to various factors, such as the occupation of the central realm, the adoption of Confucian principles, and a long-lasting reign. With these factors he not only denies the legitimate status of the Eastern Jin and ensuing Southern Dynasties due to their loss of the central realm and their short reigns, but also highlights the Northern Wei's legitimate status by introducing their rulers' great merits. He also highlights that the Northern Wei's legitimacy was gradually established and that the Western Jin produced the rightful dynastic phase for the Northern Wei.

5.1.1.2 Chen Shidao

Chen Shidao once served as "Erudite of the National University" and "Proofreader of the Palace Library" (*mishusheng zhengzi* 秘書省正字) in the Northern Song Dynasty.[22] He was a famous scholar and left many well-known poems to posterity.[23]

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[18] Ibid., 92.
[19] Hok-lam Chan also mentions that the Western Han bypassed the Qin Dynasty and established the Zhou Dynasty as its predecessor. See Hok-lam Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China*, 28-31.
[20] In Section 2.1.2 the argument is made that the Northern Wei did not follow the dynastic phase of the Sixteen Kingdoms, and eventually adopted the Water Phase, which was generated by the Western Jin's Metal Phase.
[21] Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 91.
[22] *Songshi*, 444. 13115-16.

Chen Shidao composed the essay "Zhengtong lun" 正統論 (Discourse on Legitimacy), in which he defends Wang Tong's views on the Northern Wei, and introduces three standards of legitimacy to support the Northern Wei's legitimate status.[24]

The three standards of political legitimacy identified by Chen Shidao are "Heaven" (*tian* 天), "Earth" (*di* 地), and "Human" (*ren* 人).[25] According to Chen's essay, the standard of "Heaven" is used to investigate whether a dynasty obtains the Mandate from Heaven. The standard of "Earth" determines a dynasty's legitimacy by its occupation of the central realm.[26] Chen literally reproduces Wang Tong's definition of the central realm, defining it as a combination of the area historically governed by Chinese dynasties, and the place that adopted Confucian principles.[27] The standard of "Human" suggests that a ruler with grand virtues and achievements could be legitimate.[28] In reference to the criteria of legitimacy that I outlined in the Introduction, Chen's three standards are similar to the cosmological, geographical and moral criteria. Adopting these three standards, Chen discusses various legitimacy disputes prior to the Northern Song.[29] The way in which he views the Northern Wei is investigated below.

Chen Shidao presents a three-stage succession of legitimate dynasties resembling Wang Tong's version to respond to the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute. The Eastern Jin possessed legitimate status in the first stage (290 to 396) since this dynasty met the standards of "Heaven" and "Human," possessing the Mandate of Heaven and having virtuous and capable rulers. Similarly to Wang Tong, Chen Shidao views the Eastern Jin as legitimate due to this dynasty's great achievement in caring for the people, as well as its Chinese culture, even though this dynasty lost large areas of northern China and hence failed to meet the standard of "Earth."[30] In the second

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[23] Chen Shidao's poetry collections, *Houshan ci* 後山詞, is extant today.
[24] This essay is included in Rao Zongyi's book, which is cited in the following discussion.
[25] Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo Shixue*, 108.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid. The Confucian commentaries on the *Book of Changes* Heaven, Earth and Human are identified as the three ultimates of the world. See De Bary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol. 1*, 299, 321.
[29] Chen's essay also mentions other legitimacy disputes: the Eastern Zhou 東周 (770 – 221 BCE), the Kingdom Qi 齊國 (1046-221 BCE) and Jin 晉國 (1046 BCE-376 BCE) in the Spring and Autumn period, the Qin Dynasty 秦朝 (221-207 BCE) and Xin Dynasty, the Cao Wei Dynasty (220-265) and the Later Liang 後梁 (907-923). Ibid., 108-109.
[30] Ibid., 109.

stage (396 to 479), Chen argues for two kinds of legitimate dynasties. On the one side is the newly established dynasty, the Northern Wei, which partially meets the standards of "Heaven" and "Earth" by possessing the Mandate of Heaven and occupying northern China. On the other side are the Eastern Jin and the ensuing Liu Song dynasties, which still meet the standards of "Heaven" and "Human." Chen views the latter two dynasties as being of superior legitimacy compared with the Northern Wei, since they still firmly preserved Chinese culture and cherished the desire to reoccupy the central realm.[31] In the final stage (479-588), the Northern Wei met the standard of "Human" when Emperor Xiaowen ascended the throne. Similarly to Wang Tong, Chen Shidao views Emperor Xiaowen as a virtuous ruler who accomplished great achievements. The Northern Wei rulers, therefore, met all three standards and were thus legitimate rulers of the central realm. The Southern Dynasties at this stage became illegitimate since they failed to meet any of the three standards of legitimacy.[32]

Next, Chen Shidao mounts a defense of a significantly controversial idea in the *Zhongshuo*, namely that the Southern Qi, Liang, and Chen dynasties, rather than the Northern Wei, were "barbarians."[33] Chen's essay provides a novel explanation of this idea, one that does not occur in the *Zhongshuo*:

> If barbarians transform [by adopting Chinese culture], even if they are not purely Chinese, i.e. Xia, the gentleman promotes them. If Chinese transform [by losing virtue], even if they are not purely barbarian, the gentleman rejects them. 夷而變，雖未純乎夏，君子進之也。夏而變，雖未純乎夷，君子斥之也。[34]

Chen points out that it is simply a rhetorical technique to describe some Southern Dynasties as "barbarian" while praising the purportedly "barbarian" Northern Wei rulers as Chinese due their adoption of Chinese culture or political ways.[35]

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] The *Zhongshuo* refers to the Southern Qi, Liang, and Chen Dynasty as "barbarians," politically speaking. See Section 4.2.1.
[34] Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 109.
[35] This type of rhetorical device, to debase Chinese as "barbarians" in political discourse, may derive from the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals). Yuri Pines provides an insightful study on this issue. See Pines, "Beasts or Humans," 59-102.

In short, Chen Shidao employs the cosmological, geographical and moral criteria to discuss legitimacy. He uses his standards of "Heaven," "Earth" and "Human" to describe of the Northern Wei's progressive increase of legitimacy. He also shows that it is appropriate to extol the Northern Wei rulers as legitimate "Chinese" monarchs while denigrating rulers of the Southern Dynasties as "barbarians."

Zhang Fangping and Chen Shidao were not the only thinkers to engage in this discussion in this period. In 984 and 1013, the Northern Song court commissioned scholars to compose two political encyclopedias, the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era) and *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 (Outstanding Models from the Storehouse of Literature). The Northern Wei rulers, rather than the Southern Dynasties, were determined to be legitimate in both books, indicating that it was popular to view the Northern Wei as legitimate in the Northern Song period.[36]

5.1.2 Both Sides Fail to be Legitimate

In the previous section it was suggested that the Northern Wei had various supporters during the Northern Song. Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang, however, questioned the Northern Wei's legitimacy. Both scholars discuss various legitimacy disputes in history only to conclude that both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties failed to be legitimate.

5.1.2.1. Ouyang Xiu

Ouyang Xiu served as a high-ranking official in the Northern Song court and also proved himself to be a talented historian by compiling two of the Chinese official histories, the *Xin Wudaishi* 新五代史 (New History of the Five Dynasties) and the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (New History of Tang). Having dealt with the legitimacy of the Five Dynasties while the compiling these works,[37] Ouyang Xiu in the year 1040 presented

[36] There are some differences between these two books. In the *Taiping yulan*, volumes 95 to 105 record the Northern Wei and its descendants and denote these dynasties as legitimate. Volumes 128 to 134 record the Eastern Jin and the Southern Dynasties and describe them as inferior in legitimacy. The *Cefu Yuangui* also depicts the Eastern Jin as legitimate and records this dynasty, along with the Northern Wei and its descendants in the first volume. This book denotes all the other Southern Dynasties as inferior in legitimacy in volume 182.

[37] In his "Zhengtong lun," Ouyang Xiu explains that when he composed the history of the Five Dynasties, he was annoyed by previous scholars' debates about whether the Later Liang 後梁 (907–

a series of essays titled "Zhengtong lun" 正統論 (Discourse on Legitimacy) to the court, which revealed his view on legitimacy in general and on specific legitimacy disputes, including the Northern Wei.[38] In these essays, Ouyang Xiu discusses the Northern Wei by following three procedures: (a) he formulates a new definition of *zhengtong*; (b) he argues that both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties failed to be legitimate; and (c) he criticizes two popular ideas related to legitimacy.

Ouyang Xiu was one of the first scholars in Chinese history to provide a definition of *zhengtong* 正統. As he notes, "*zheng* is the means by which to put in order aspects of the world that are not yet in order; *tong* is the means by which to unite those parts of All Under Heaven that are not yet united." 正者，所以正天下之不正也。統者,，所以合天下之不一也。[39] All Under Heaven here denotes "the Chinese world," or the central realm to some extent.[40] In other words, Ouyang Xiu defines *zhengtong* as the combination of ruling the central realm with righteousness and uniting the central realm.[41] Hence, Hok-lam Chan explains Ouyang Xiu's dual definition as a combination of "the moral right to succession" and "the fact of unified political control."[42] Ouyang Xiu's definition of *zhengtong* thus combines what I call the moral and geographical criteria of legitimacy.

Next, Ouyang Xiu introduces his definition of *zhengtong* to discuss various legitimacy disputes in history. He suggests that three major legitimacy debates existed prior to the Northern Song, related to the Qin Dynasty, the Period of Disunion, and the Five Dynasties. In the following discussion the focus is specifically on how Ouyang Xiu approaches the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute.

Ouyang Xiu first describes his disagreement with two popular views concerning the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute. Firstly, he points out that supporters of the Eastern Jin describe that dynasty as the successor of the Western Jin since both dynasties share the same ruling house. Similarly to Zhang Fangping, he points out that the Eastern Jin, rather than being a continuation of the Western Jin, was established by a distant relative of the ruling house of the Western Jin and failed to unite the central

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923) was legitimate, which is why he wrote "Zhengtong lun." See Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 歐陽修全集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 265-66.

[38] These essays are included in *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 265-286.

[39] *Ouyang Xiu Quanji*, 267.

[40] Yang Shaoyun, "Reinventing the Barbarian," 227.

[41] *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 268.

[42] Hok-lam Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China*, 39.

realm.[43] Secondly, Ouyang Xiu mentions that supporters of the Northern Wei attributed legitimacy to this dynasty on the basis of two merits: adopting Chinese culture and dominating the central realm. Ouyang Xiu disagrees, insisting that the Northern Wei was by nature the same as the short-lived northern states of the Sixteen Kingdoms period since all these states not only failed to unify the central realm but also largely relied on military power rather than the moral rule to sustain their dominance.[44] He goes on to state that ruling houses such as the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties established their reigns in their founders' self-interest.[45] In other words, none of these dynasties is entitled to be deemed *zhengtong* since they failed to adopt virtuous rule and unite the central realm.

Finally, Ouyang Xiu criticizes two widespread understandings of legitimacy. The first is to introduce the dynastic phase to discuss legitimacy.

> Since the flourishing of the ancient [sage] kings, one had to display an abundance of virtue to obtain the Mandate of Heaven, either their achievements led to benefits for the populace, or for many generations they gradually perfected the royal enterprise. How could [they] biasedly introduce a single dynastic phase (to make their rule flourish)?"
> 自古王者之興，必有盛德以受天命，或其功澤被於生民，或累世積漸而成王業，豈偏名於一德哉？[46]

The dynastic phase was long viewed as a crucial source of legitimacy in Chinese history, both by ruling houses and later scholars. In fact, during the Northern Song, scholars such as Yin Zhu 尹洙 (1001-1047) and Zhang Fangping also took into account the dynastic phase theory in their discussions about legitimacy.[47] Ouyang Xiu rejects the use of the dynastic phase, focusing instead on more pragmatic factors such

[43] *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 271-72. Similar discussions can be found in "Dongjin lun 東晉論" (Discourse of the Eastern Jin), an article written by Ouyang Xiu which specifically discusses why the Eastern Jin is not legitimate. Ibid., 282-83.
[44] Ibid., 272. Ouyang Xiu also introduces these ideas in his article "Hou-Wei lun 後魏論" (Discourse of the Eastern Jin), which is specifically a discussion of why the Northern Wei was not legitimate. Ibid., 284-85.
[45] Ibid., 271-72.
[46] Ibid., 268.
[47] Liu Pujiang, "The End of the Five Virtues," 521.

as the ruler's righteous rule, his political achievements, or the unification of the central realm as criteria to determine legitimacy.[48]

Another widespread idea regarding legitimacy, as Ouyang Xiu points out, is the supposed existence of a continuous succession of legitimate dynasties, as suggested by earlier scholars such as Wang Tong, Li Yanshou, and Huangfu Shi. Ouyang Xiu questions that kind of lineage. He argues that, as none of these dynasties succeed in meeting the two crucial requirements of *zhengtong* (righteous rule and the unification of the central realm), the notion of the succession of legitimate dynasties is compromised.[49] He also accuses previous scholars such as Wang Tong of including unqualified candidates in their lineages in order to formulate an illusionary continuous succession of legitimate dynasties.[50]

Ouyang Xiu thus puts forward his four-stage succession of legitimate dynasties. This succession consists of two kinds of legitimate dynasty, those that were established legitimately (such as the Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, and Tang dynasties), and those that were not but gradually obtained legitimacy thereafter (the Western Jin and Sui dynasties). All other dynasties are illegitimate since they failed to meet Ouyang Xiu's definition. This four-stage succession hence progresses in the following sequence.[51]

Chart 6. Ouyang Xiu's Version of the Succession of Legitimate Dynasties

Period	Legitimate Dynasties	Non-legitimate Dynasties[52]
beginning-220 CE	Legendary Kingdoms, Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han	
220-265		The Three Kingdoms
265-316	Western Jin	

[48] Prior to Ouyang Xiu, Wang Tong and Huangfu Shi had already implicitly excluded the dynastic phases as a standard of legitimacy. However, Ouyang Xiu may have been first scholar who explicitly rejected the dynastic phase theory. This, as the present-day scholar Liu Pujiang suggests, represents the rise of rationalism in Song Dynasty academia. Liu Pujiang, "The End of the Five Virtues," 513-54.
[49] *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 269.
[50] Ibid., 277.
[51] Ibid., 269-70.
[52] Ouyang Xiu stresses that no legitimate dynasty existed in the periods of the Three Kingdoms, the Northern and Southern Dynasties, the Five Dynasties. He does not describe dynasties in these periods as illegitimate.

316-581		Eastern Jin, the Northern and Southern Dynasties
581-907	Sui, Tang	
907-960		The Five Dynasties
960	Northern Song	

The first stage began with the dynasties of the (legendary) Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors period (around the 20th century BCE), followed by the Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, and Han dynasties, and ends in 220 when the Eastern Han collapsed. During the ensuing Three Kingdoms period (220-265), the succession ceased since no dynasty met the requirement of *zhengtong*. The second stage began in 265 when the Western Jin was established and ended in 316 when it collapsed. Ouyang Xiu thinks the Western Jin met his definition of *zhengtong*. Thereafter during the Period of Disunion, no dynasty was legitimate. The third stage began in 581 when the Sui Dynasty was established and ended in 907 when the Tang Dynasty collapsed. During the ensuing Five Dynasties period (907-960), this succession ceased. Finally, the Northern Song was established in 960 and restarted this succession again.[53]

In short, Ouyang Xiu defines *zhengtong* as the combination of righteous rule and the unification of the central realm. He introduces his definition to deny the legitimate status of both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties. Ouyang Xiu also rejects the validity of dynastic phases as a determinant of *zhengtong* and supports a non-continuous succession of legitimate dynasties.

5.1.2.2. Sima Guang

After Ouyang Xiu released his studies on *zhengtong* and legitimacy disputes, another Northern Song scholar, Zhang Wangzhi 章望之 (11th century) provided his critiques.[54] Supporters of Ouyang Xiu, such as Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), Chen Shidao

[53] Ibid., 270.
[54] As Yang Shaoyun points out, "Zhang Wangzhi had already criticized Ouyang's original position on the Cao-Wei and Later Liang on the grounds that neither regime had achieved a reunification of 'all under heaven'." See Yang Shaoyun, "Reinventing the Barbarian," 228.

and Sima Guang, participated in the debate.[55] In this section the thought of one of the most distinguished followers of Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang, is examined.

Sima Guang was a famous politician and historian in the Northern Song court.[56] He once served as the "Vice Director of the Department of State Affairs and Concurrent Vice-Director of the Chancellery" (*Shangshu zuopuye jian mengxia shilang* 尚書左僕射兼門下侍郎), the approximation of a vice-prime minister in the mid-Song Dynasty.[57] From 1065 to 1084, the Northern Song court appointed Sima Guang to compile the famous chronological history *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governance).[58] This history includes a commentary that deals with legitimacy disputes.[59] Echoing Ouyang Xiu's views on legitimacy, this commentary first provides Sima Guang's understandings of *zhengtong*, then attacks three popular views concerning the legitimacy disputes (including the Northern Wei), and ends with the author's answer to these disputes.

In his commentary Sima Guang first discusses the requirement for the legitimacy of a ruler from a historical perspective. He mentions that humans do not have sufficient ability to create an orderly society, and thus require the leadership of a ruler.[60] Sima Guang points out that numerous rulers existed in the early period of (Chinese) civilization and that a superior ruler emerged thereafter. This was the Son of Heaven, who wielded his power over All Under Heaven.[61] Sima Guang describes the legitimate ruler by saying "I humbly believe that someone who fails to make the nine

[55] Rao Zongyi provides a general introduction to the views of Ouyang Xiu's followers. See Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 39-44, 92-113.
[56] McLaren, "Challenging Official History," 332.
[57] In 1076, the Northern Song adopted a reform of the official system. Under this reform, the official title of the vice-prime minster changed from "Participant in Determining Governmental Matters" (both Zhang Fangping and Ouyang Xiu held this position) to "Vice-Director of the Department of State Affairs and Concurrent Vice-Director of the Chancellery," the official title of Sima Guang. See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 395.
[58] *Songshi*, 336.10762-63.
[59] *ZZTJ*, 69.2185-88. Sima Guang also discussed the legitimacy dispute in one of his letters. This letter is included in Rao Zongyi's *Zhongguo shixue*, 111-113.
[60] *ZZTJ*, 69.2185. Sima Guang continues by highlighting the two basic responsibilities of a qualified ruler (*jun* 君 as it used to be rendered), "to prohibit violence and eliminate evil, thereby assuring [his people] a safe life; to reward good deeds and punish bad deeds and thereby prevent [his people] from slipping into disorder. 禁暴除害以保全其生, 賞善罰惡使不至於亂." Ibid., 69.2185.
[61] Ibid., 69.2186. In later periods, an alternative title *huangdi* 皇帝 was used to replace the title *wang* 王 (king) to refer to *tianzi*, as mentioned in Section 2.1.

domains [i.e., the central realm] one,[62] he only has the name of Son of Heaven without actually being one" 竊以為苟不能使九州合為一統，皆有天子之名而無其實者也.[63] Apparently, Sima Guang sees the unification of the central realm as a precondition for being regarded as a legitimate ruler. He differs from Ouyang Xiu, who focuses on both the ruler's righteous rule and the unification of the realm.

Similarly to Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang attacks prevalent views concerning legitimacy, which are frequently introduced by scholars to discuss the Northern Wei's legitimacy. The first problematic view is to include abdication in the discussion of legitimacy. Previous historians such as Sheng Yue, Xiao Zixian, and Li Yanshou, support that idea and argue that a dynasty could inherit the legitimacy of its abdicated predecessor. Sima Guang points out this idea actually leads to a dilemma in discussing the Northern Wei's legitimacy dispute. As his commentary indicates, the Chen Dynasty, a legitimate dynasty in the view of Southern Dynasties' supporters, failed to abdicate and transfer its rule to a later dynasty; and the Northern Wei, a legitimate dynasty as far as its supporters are concerned, did not have any predecessor that abdicated to transfer its legitimacy to the Northern Wei.[64] This leads Sima Guang to disagree with using abdication as a factor in the study of legitimacy disputes.

The second problematic view is to see the dominance of parts of the central realm as a reason for accepting a dynasty's legitimacy. Scholars such as Gao Lüe, Wang Tong, and his followers used this idea to support the Northern Wei's legitimate status. Sima Guang points out that this idea fails to explain why dynasties in the Period of Disunion, such as the Former Zhao, Former Yan, and Former Qin, were viewed as illegitimate by most scholars in history, even though these dynasties had all once occupied northern China, the alleged heartland of the central realm.[65]

The third problematic view is to consider a state legitimate due to its ruler being virtuous, a view held by Wang Tong and Chen Shidao, for instance, to support the Northern Wei's legitimacy. Sima Guang disagrees. Without giving any examples, he states that states far away from the central realm may have virtuous rulers, but they

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[62] The *Book of Documents* includes the *Shugong* 禹貢, an address allegedly by Dayu 大禹, the founder of the Xia Dynasty. The speaker notes that the central realm has nine domains. See *Shangshu zhengyi*, 132-153. Later scholars in Chinese history therefore used the nine domains to refer to the central realm.
[63] *ZZTJ*, 69.2186. In another article, Sima Guang admits that this idea can be derived from Ouyang Xiu's discussion, in which the unification of the central realm was posited as a crucial attribute of legitimacy. Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 112.
[64] *ZZTJ*, 69.2187.
[65] Ibid., 69.2187. Sima Guang indicates that these dynasties in the division period were short-lived and ruled their people brutally; thus few historians in history viewed them as legitimate.

would not be viewed as legitimate rulers of the central realm, whereas dynasties that are generally seen as legitimate in Chinese history may have had immoral rulers.[66]

Finally, Sima Guang discusses legitimacy disputes prior to the Northern Song. It is clear that it was only during periods in which China was not unified that dynasties were involved in legitimacy disputes due to the fact that co-existing dynasties strove to be legitimate. The disputes re-emerged when later scholars debated with each other on what constituted the legitimate status of these co-existing dynasties. Sima Guang, however, questions the necessity of these later scholarly debates. He stresses that all dynasties in the division period were far from being legitimate since they failed to unite the central realm. Even though these dynasties could vary widely, from Chinese to "barbarian," from virtuous to brutal, from big to small, and from mighty to weak, Sima Guang asks to what extent one of them could be determined to be legitimate while describing others as illegitimate.[67]

As a historian, Sima Guang could not escape the discussion about legitimacy. It was customary for historians to date events according to the reign titles of rulers from dynasties they considered legitimate. In so doing, they revealed what dynasties they considered legitimate. Hence, Sima Guang also needed to choose the "correct" reign titles to date the periods in which the central realm had more than one dynasty and in which some of them competed with others for legitimacy. Sima Guang stresses that his choices merely follow popular conventions and do not reflect his views on legitimacy.[68] His choice of reign titles is based on the following principles. The reign titles of several dynasties (Zhou, Qin, Han, Western Jin, Eastern Jin, Sui, and Tang), are used because China was unified under their rule.[69] In periods when the central realm had various co-existing dynasties, Sima Guang adopts the reign titles of some dynasties despite the fact that he considers none of them legitimate. Specifically, he chooses the reign titles of the Cao Wei Dynasty to date events in the Three Kingdoms period, the reign titles of the various Southern Dynasties to date events in the Period of Disunion, and the reign titles of the Five Dynasties to date events in 10th century

[66] Ibid., 69.2187.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid. In contrast to Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang views the Eastern Jin as the continuation of the Western Jin, with little explanation.

China.[70] Although Sima Guang adopts the reign title of the Southern Dynasties, he reiterates that this does not mean he sees them as legitimate.

In short, Sima Guang continues Ouyang Xiu's discussion on *zhengtong*. He relies heavily on the unification of the central realm to determine legitimacy. He further questions three prevailing ideas concerning legitimacy, arguing that abdication, occupation of only part of the central realm, and dominion by a virtuous ruler fail to ensure a dynasty's legitimate status. Sima Guang concludes by stressing that both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties were not legitimate, even though he adopts the reign title of the Southern Dynasties in his history.

5.1.3 The Northern Wei is Illegitimate

In the 12th century, the pursuance of legitimacy became an urgent issue. Both the Jurchen-led Jin Dynasty and the Southern Song proclaimed themselves to be the legitimate ruler of the central realm. Perhaps with an eye on the Jurchen Jin, the ethnic criterion became influential in Southern Song discussions on legitimacy in general, and on the Northern Wei in particular.[71] Zhu Fu 朱黼 (1140-1215) and Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133-1150), for instance, asserted that the Northern Wei's "barbarian" rulers and "barbaric" rule precluded this dynasty from being accorded legitimate status.[72] Meanwhile, along with the flourishing of Neo-Confucianism, the moral criterion of legitimacy had become increasingly significant in scholarly discussions about legitimacy.[73] Although the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi seemingly agreed with Sima Guang's views and defined a legitimate dynasty according to its unification of the central realm, he also stressed that the monarch's obedience to morality was of considerable significance to his legitimacy.[74] Therefore, Peter Bol points out that "the Neo-Confucians' view of politics shifted moral authority away from the political system and towards the individual, with a new conception of the

[70] Ibid., 69.2187-88.
[71] Cao Pengcheng 曹鵬程, "Shishu nansong de zhengtonglun 試述南宋的正統論," *Sichuan shifan daxue xuebao* 四川師範大學學報 40.5 (2013):143-149.
[72] Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 116. Zhu Fu 朱黼, *Yongjia zhuxiansheng sanguo liuchao wudai jinian zongbian* 永嘉朱先生三國六朝五代紀年總辨 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997), 565, 572.
[73] Bol indicates that Neo-Confucianism strove to constrain autocratic dynasties by introducing Confucian moral principles. See Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 151-152.
[74] Li Jingde, *Zhuzi yulei*, 105.2636. For further information on Zhu Xi's support of the moral criterion of legitimacy, see Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi qunshu* 朱子全書 (Shanghai: shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 8.22.

self as grounds for morality in society and politics."[75] This section discusses a typical and influential representative, Zheng Sixiao.

Zheng Sixiao lived in the last half of the 13th century, when the Mongol Yuan defeated the Jurchen Jin and kept on striking the Southern Song. Shocked by the Southern Song's defeat by a Mongolian power, in about 1278 Zheng Sixiao wrote an essay titled "Gujin zhengtong dalun" 古今正統大論 (Grand Discourse about Legitimacy in Past and Present).[76] To discuss the Northern Wei's *zhengtong* status, Zheng examined the moral dimensions of legitimacy before explaining why non-Chinese dynasties, including the Northern Wei, were illegitimate. The essay ends with Zheng Sixiao's version of the succession of legitimate dynasties.

After Ouyang Xiu provided his bipartite definition of *zhengtong*, namely righteous rule and unification of the central realm, an increasing number of scholars followed that definition in their legitimacy discussions. Sima Guang, as the previous section revealed, focused on the latter dimension and described a dynasty as legitimate only when it ruled over a unified central realm. Zheng Sixiao focuses on the first dimension and argues that only after bringing order to the central realm by means of his great virtue, could a ruler be credited with legitimacy.[77] This idea evidently reflected the moral criterion of legitimacy, in which the legitimacy of a dynasty is determined by the virtue of its rulers. To better establish his conception, Zheng discusses the relation between four terms: All under Heaven, the central realm, *zhengtong*, and sage ruler. He points out that dominance of All under Heaven alone does not ensure legitimacy.[78] He further argues that occupying the central realm and adopting Chinese term do not ensure a dynasty's legitimacy. This seemingly aims to deny the legitimate status of any non-Chinese who had adopted Chinese culture, such as the Northern Wei or the Jurchen Jin Dynasty. Zheng declares that "only the sage ruler can combine and unite All under Heaven, the central realm, and *zhengtong*." 惟

[75] Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 4.
[76] This essay is included in *Zheng Sixiao ji* 鄭思肖集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), 132-37. Yang Shaoyun also studies this essay, see Yang Shaoyun, "Reinventing the Barbarian," 388-399. Note that Zheng Sixiao put most of his essays, including this one, into an iron casket and dropped that casket into a well. Around 1638, the casket was discovered and Zheng Sixiao's works were made known to the public.
[77] Zheng Sixiao, *Zheng Sixiao ji*, 132.
[78] The aim of this idea is probably to deny the Yuan Dynasty's legitimate status since this non-Chinese dynasty had ruled vast territories beyond the central realm. All Under Heaven in Zheng Sixiao's article hence refers to the whole world known to the contemporaneous Chinese people.

聖人始可以合天下、中國、正統而一之.[79] Apparently, Zheng Sixiao determines that the moral ruler is the crucial component of any legitimate dynasty. This idea possibly derives from Neo-Confucianism, given that this ideology was prevalent in the late Southern Song period.[80]

Secondly, Zheng reintroduces the ethnic criterion of legitimacy to denote non-Chinese dynasties as illegitimate. He indicates two kinds of illegitimate dynasties: those built by usurpers and those by "barbarians." The first kind of dynasty is illegitimate because of its immoral founders, who violated moral principles and rebelled against their lords.[81] The second kind of dynasty is illegitimate due to its "barbarian" nature. Zheng Sixiao puts much emphasis on this idea.

Prior to the Tang Dynasty, historians such as Wei Shou, Shen Yue, and Xiao Zixian, as we have seen, frequently adopted the ethnic criterion of legitimacy when discussing the Northern Wei. Scholars' interest in that criterion, however, seemingly faded from the Tang onwards. On the one hand, Wang Tong and Zhang Fangping, for instance, had argued that "barbarian" ethnicity does not preclude the Northern Wei's legitimacy. Chen Shidao had also pointed out that the Northern Wei's rulers could even be viewed as political Chinese due to their adoption of Chinese ways. On the other hand, historians such as Li Yanshou, Ouyang Xiu, and Sima Guang scarcely mentioned the dichotomy between "barbarian" and "Chinese" when discussing legitimacy in general or the Northern Wei legitimacy issue in particular. Nevertheless, the severe conflict between non-Chinese and Chinese in the Song Dynasty had a major impact on the world in which Zheng Sixiao lived, which led him to reintroduce the ethnic criterion.

Zheng Sixiao argues that barbarians and Chinese have different physiological natures, saying that barbarians originated from "aberrant *qi*" (*nieqi* 孽氣), in contrast to the Chinese, who originated from "rightful *qi*" (*zhengqi* 正氣).[82] Only within the central realm was *qi* perfectly balanced and gave rise to civilization, while *qi* in the barbarians' homelands was not properly aligned and thus they were denied the benefits of civilization, or so Zheng Sixiao claims. Therefore, he stresses that the

[79] Zheng Sixiao, *Zheng Sixiao ji*, 135.
[80] Zhu Xi's great influences on scholars' views on legitimacy in the late Southern Song, see Wang Jianmei 王建美, "Zhuxi lixue yu yuanchu de zhengtong lun 朱熹理學與元初的正統論," *Shixueshi yanjiu* 2 (2006): 26-31.
[81] Zheng Sixiao, *Zheng Sixiao ji*, 132, 134.
[82] Ibid., 133.

central realm is the exclusive domain of Chinese. All non-Chinese, as he argues, should live in their original habitats and cherish their own indigenous cultures. He asserts, "It is not a blessing but an aberration for barbarians to follow the ways of the central realm" 夷狄行中國事，非夷狄之福，實夷狄之妖孽。[83] To illustrate this idea, Zheng Sixiao provides a colorful metaphor: if a horse or a cow speaks a human language and wears human clothes, people would describe that animal as a monster, not as a human being.[84] This applies to the Northern Wei rulers, Zheng says, because they did not maintain their indigenous Tuoba customs, but adopted Chinese culture instead, which makes the Northern Wei an aberration of a barbarian dynasty.

Zheng Sixiao also criticizes two ways in which the ethnic disparity between non-Chinese and Chinese is decreased. The first way is found in Wei Shou's *Weishu*, in which it is argued that the Tuoba people could have derived their original ancestry from the Yellow Emperor. Zheng Sixiao rejects this view with another colorful analogy, saying that a thief or slave cannot prove himself a gentleman even if he has aristocratic forebears. For a similar reason, it was groundless for the Tuoba people to cite their supposed ancestor, the Yellow Emperor, in order to declare themselves Chinese.[85] The second way was posited by Zhang Fangping, who claimed that non-Chinese could found legitimate dynasties since some sage kings in ancient China, such as Yu and King Wen, were also "barbarians." Zheng Sixiao criticizes that idea, stressing that the sage kings were the authentic offspring of the Yellow Emperor, and therefore Chinese. It is merely because they came to "barbarian" lands and established their regimes there that people in later periods falsely viewed these sage kings as "barbarians."[86]

Finally, Zheng Sixiao advances his version of the succession of legitimate dynasties. This succession follows both the moral and ethnic criteria of legitimacy. It excludes the Cao Wei and Jin dynasties since their founders were usurpers, and it also excludes the Northern Wei and successive dynasties since they were established by barbarians. Zheng's succession even excludes the Sui and Tang dynasties since they had "barbarian" royal blood.[87] Notably, Zheng's succession also excludes the Southern Dynasties, even though they had Chinese rulers. The reason, although not

[83] Ibid., 132.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 133.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 133-34.

specifically mentioned in his essay, could be that the Southern Dynasties failed to meet the moral criterion due to the fact that their founders were usurpers and because of their notorious governance.[88]

In short, Zheng Sixiao highlights the moral and ethnic criteria in discussing legitimacy, viewing a legitimate rule as a Chinese-ruled central realm with virtuous monarchs. Being virtuous and Chinese are two prerequisites of the legitimate ruler. In view of the Northern Wei, Zheng stresses that this dynasty, like all other non-Chinese dynasties, had no access to legitimacy because of their "barbarian" rulers. He provides a succession of legitimate dynasties, which sees the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties as illegitimate due to their barbarian and usurping founders respectively.

5.2 Views after the Song Dynasty

From the 13th century onwards, a series of dynasties – Yuan, Ming, and Qing – ruled the entire central realm and resolutely claimed their *zhengtong* status. A considerable number of scholars during this period still showed an interest in the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute. A possible reason could be the fierce conflict between Chinese and non-Chinese during this period. The Yuan and Qing were non-Chinese dynasties while the Ming was continually at war with the northern "barbarians." The Northern Wei legitimacy dispute was relevant to the issue of how to assess non-Chinese rulers' legitimate status in contrast to that of the Chinese dynasties, which scholars from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties also encountered. Thus, among the scholars of this period, whoever served a Chinese or non-Chinese dynasty was expected to indirectly support their dynasty's legitimacy by denying or supporting the legitimacy of the Northern Wei. For example, most supporters of the Northern Wei, such as two scholars from the Yuan Dynasty, Yang Huan 楊奐 (1186-1255) and Hao Jing 郝經 (1223-1275), and a scholar from the Qing Dynasty, Shao Tingcai 邵廷采 (1648-1711), shared the idea that non-Chinese dynasties — including the Northern Wei as well as the dynasty that they served — could be legitimate if they adopted Chinese

[88] Yang Shaoyun notes that in Zheng Sixiao's views, "the key criterion for legitimacy that they [the Jin Dynasty and the Southern Dynasties] failed to meet was not ethnicity but governance: the two Jin dynasties 'absolutely did not govern well' 絕無善治, while the Southern Dynasties 'kept the lifeblood of the Central Lands flowing by one feeble artery' 綴中國之一脈 and also 'all did not govern well' 俱無善治." Yang Shaoyun, "Reinventing the Barbarian," 394-395.

culture and followed Confucian political principles.[89] Opponents of the Northern Wei's legitimacy, such as the Ming scholars Fang Xiaoru, Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559) and Qiu Jun 丘浚 (1421-1495), partially agreed with Zheng Sixiao's views and defined all non-Chinese dynasties as illegitimate, thereby indirectly rendering support to the legitimate status of the dynasty that they served.[90] A large number of scholars during this period discussed *zhengtong* in general, as well as the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute in particular, typically building on earlier views. Since few of them made significant or original contributions to the discussion on legitimacy, the specifics of these scholars' views will not be dealt with here. Instead, the following two sections comprise an outline of the views of two opposing perspectives held by post-Song Dynasty scholars who provide us with some fresh and innovative perspectives from which to view legitimacy in general and the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute in particular. The first perspective is represented by the Ming scholar Fang Xiaoru, who appealed to Neo-Confucianism to deny *zhengtong* to both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties. The second is represented by Wang Fuzhi and Liang Qichao, who deconstructed *zhengtong* and suggested that no dynasty in history — including the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties – could be described as *zhengtong*.

5.2.1 The Adoption of Neo-Confucianism: Fang Xiaoru

Born in 1357, Fang Xiaoru was a well-acknowledged writer of literature during his time and once served as "Hanlin Academician" (*hanlin xueshi* 翰林學士). However, in 1402 when Zhu Di 朱棣 (1360-1424), the future Yongle Emperor 永樂帝 (r. 1402-1424), usurped the throne, Fang Xiaoru was executed for his resolute criticism of that usurpation.[91] Fang Xiaoru's discussions on the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute can be found in the essay "Shitong" 釋統 (Interpretation of Succession).[92] In this essay, Fang Xiaoru first introduces so-called "Heavenly principles" to describe legitimacy, in which the emphasis is on both the moral and ethnic criteria of legitimacy. He also

[89] Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 125-127, 202-205. Yang Shaoyun also briefly mentions Yang Huan and Hao Jing's views in his discussion. See Yang Shaoyun, "Reinventing the Barbarian," 381-388.
[90] Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 161-162, 163-165.
[91] For biographical information on Fang Xiaoru, see *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 426-33, and Zhang Tingyu 张廷玉 and others comp. *Mingshi* 明史 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), 141.4017-21.
[92] This essay is included in the corpus of Fang Xiaoru's writings. See Fang Xiaoru, *Xunzhizhai ji* 遜志齋集 (Ningbo: Ningbo chubanshe, 2000), 52-56.

studies types of dynastic succession, arguing for "rightful" and "variable" succession. Fang finally states that neither the Northern Wei nor the Southern Dynasties were legitimate.

As noted above, scholars prior to Fang Xiaoru appealed to various factors, such as auspicious portents, dynastic phases, long reigns, virtuous and Chinese rulers, and the unification of the central realm to determine legitimacy. Fang, however, questions these factors. In the first section of his essay, he asks whether we can equate brutal and short-lived dynasties, such as the Qin and Sui, with glorious and long-lasting ones, such as the Zhou and Han.[93] This could be possible, since all these dynasties had different pieces of evidence to support their legitimacy, such as the unification of the central realm or the adoption of the rightful dynastic phase.[94] However, Fang describes this as ridiculous. He argues that any discussion about legitimacy should be based on "Heavenly principles," the core notion of Neo-Confucianism, which, as he indicates, could enable one to distinguish illegitimate dynasties from legitimate ones. Heavenly principle, as Antonio Cua points out, "is often used to convey the Neo-Confucian notion of *ren*, the ideal of the universe, as a moral community."[95] Fang Xiaoru provides some clues about how Heavenly principles could be used to discuss legitimacy.

> As for the discussion about legitimacy, what does it take to be successful? If we add the label [legitimate] to [a regime] because it rules All under Heaven, then why does that regime not add the label by itself, since it [is powerful enough to] rule All under Heaven? However, because we wish to use this [discussion of legitimacy] to praise or criticize [dynasties in history], to bring order to the major distinctions [among various social classes], to explain the righteous relationship between rulers and officials, to shed light on the difference between benevolence and tyranny, to include Chinese and exclude Barbarians, and to support Heavenly principles and punish the malpractice of man, it should not be left undiscussed.

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[93] Fang Xiaoru, *Xunzhizhai ji*, 52.
[94] These four dynasties all declared their possession of the Mandate of Heaven (the cosmological criterion), had Chinese ruling houses (the ethnic criterion), succeeded to the thrones of previous dynasties (the historical criterion) and ruled the central realm (the geographical criterion).
[95] Antonio S. Cua, "Reason and Principle," in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, ed., Antonio S. Cua (New York; London: Routledge, 2003), 636.

正統之說，何為而立耶？苟以其全有天下，故以是名加之，則彼固有天下矣，何不加以是名也？苟欲假此以寓褒貶，正大分，申君臣之義，明仁暴之別，內夏外夷，扶天理而誅人偽，則不宜無辯。[96]

It is evident that rather than citing a dynasty's dominance of the central realm to support its legitimacy, Fang Xiaoru believes the discussion of legitimacy should represent a moral evaluation of a dynasty, highlight social order, distinguish between benevolent rule and tyranny, and support the dichotomy between "barbarian" and "Chinese." All these factors could be viewed as specific terms of Heavenly principles, which generally represent various Confucian moral principles, such as righteousness and benevolence. Fang also views the dichotomy between "barbarian" and "Chinese" as a part of Heavenly principles. Apparently, in Fang's understanding, Heavenly principles include both the moral and ethnic criterion of legitimacy.

Next, Fang Xiaoru argues for a twofold classification of dynastic succession. The first type is "rightful succession" (*zhengtong* 正統), which was accomplished by two kinds of legitimate dynasties.[97] The superior kind included the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Zhou), which were completely legitimate due to their absolute obedience to Heavenly principles.[98] The inferior kind consisted of three dynasties (Han, Tang, and Song) which, while not equal to the superior dynasties, had practiced some manner of virtuous rule and were therefore included.[99] Fang argues that the Mandate of Heaven, or political legitimacy, was transferred between these six dynasties, which constituted the "rightful succession" category.

The second type of dynastic succession is "variable succession" (*biantong* 變統) which was practiced by three classes of illegitimate dynasties that violated Heavenly principles. These three classes, as Fang Xiaoru points out, are dynasties founded by usurpation, such as the Eastern Jin and all the Southern Dynasties;[100]

[96] Fang Xiaoru, *Xunzhizhai ji*, 52-53.
[97] Ibid., 53.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 53-54. Fang Xiaoru gives a further explanation about why he includes these three dynasties in the list of rightful successions. He admits that it is hard for a dynasty to reach the same level of legitimacy as the three sage kingdoms, which could frustrate rulers' desire for legitimacy and thereby lessen their desire to adopt morality in politics.
[100] Ibid., 57-58. Fang Xiaoru specifically points out that the usurping monarch violated the moral norms between lord and subject by betraying and replacing their lords to establish their own rules.

those ruled by tyrants, such as the Qin and Sui; and those governed by barbarians or females, such as the Northern Wei and the Wu Zhou 武周朝 (690-705).[101]

Note that Fang specifically discusses why a barbarian dynasty is illegitimate by referring to the ethnic criterion. He accuses rulers of "barbarian" dynasties, such as the Northern Wei, of practicing inferior culture and having insufficient conscience to follow moral principles.[102] Similar to Zheng Sixiao, Fang Xiaoru describes barbarians as "beasts." His analogy is that of a child who would try to kill a beast even if that beast presented itself as human, indicating that a barbarian ruler could not be viewed as civilized and legitimate even if he adopted Chinese culture.[103]

In short, Fang Xiaoru appeals to Heavenly principles to discuss legitimacy and views a legitimate dynasty as one that embodies Confucian values of righteousness and benevolence. He provides a classification of dynasties, in terms of which the Eastern Jin and Southern Dynasties are determined to be illegitimate because they were established through usurpation, and the Northern Wei as illegitimate because of their supposedly barbarian rulers.

5.2.2 The Deconstruction of *zhengtong*

From the end of the Ming Dynasty, a new perspective emerged in the study of legitimacy. Some scholars started to reflect on previous theories and questioned the traditional cornerstone of legitimacy, the idea of *zhengtong* 正統. Their perspective greatly broadened scholarly understanding of legitimacy in general and the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute in particular. This section analyzes two scholars, Wang Fuzhi and Liang Qichao, who deconstructed the idea of *zhengtong* and described both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties as illegitimate. The former questioned the validity of *zhengtong* and replaced it with terms *zhitong* and *daotong*. The latter went even further, arguing that the concept of *zhengtong* actually supported iniquitous autocracy, and introduced the Western idea of constitutionalism to discuss legitimacy.

[101] Ibid., 53-54. A female ruler could not be legitimate since she ruled males, which violated the moral principles regarding male and female, as Fang Xiaoru points out.
[102] Ibid., 60.
[103] Ibid., 59. Although Fang Xiaoru offers Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei high praise, he still views the Northern Wei as illegitimate.

5.2.2.1. Wang Fuzhi

Wang Fuzhi was born in the late Ming period. In 1644, his family was ruined in the turmoil that led to the founding of the Qing Dynasty. Wang served the exiled Ming court in the ensuing years, but once the Qing had conquered all of China, he retreated to his hometown. During the remaining forty years of his life, he lived in seclusion and devoted himself to scholarly pursuits.[104]

Wang Fuzhi was one of the first thinkers to question the validity of *zhengtong*. His work *Du tongjian lun* 讀通鑒論 (Reading Notes of the Comprehensive Mirror) includes discussions about legitimacy, which focus principally on two topics: to show the shortcomings of *zhengtong* and to explain the advantages of two alternative terms: *zhitong* 治統 (succession of rulers) and *daotong* 道統 (succession of the [Confucian] way).[105] He also denies legitimacy to both the Northern Wei and Southern Dynasties.

Wang Fuzhi first points out three shortcomings of the term *zhengtong*: its disgraceful origin, false application, and questionable premise.

To demonstrate the disgraceful origin of *zhengtong*, Wang offers a historical review of the term. In contrast to present-day scholars, who argue that *zhengtong* was first introduced by the Eastern Han historian Ban Gu, Wang Fuzhi states that term was introduced during the Cao Wei Dynasty (220–265), when it was argued that a dynasty could be included in the legitimate succession of dynasties if it inherited the throne from the previous dynasty.[106] Following that idea, the Cao Wei could be considered legitimate because Cao Pi, its founder, had inherited the throne after the abdication of the last ruler of the Eastern Han. Wang Fuzhi indicates that *zhengtong* in this case played a disgraceful role since it served to legitimize the usurpation. Thereafter, the term *zhengtong* was used by a series of dynasties, including the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the Southern Dynasties, to legitimize their usurpation-based establishments.[107]

The second shortcoming of *zhengtong* rests upon one of its major applications: to be included in the list of legitimate successions by adopting the dynastic phase.[108] Ouyang Xiu had already criticized the use of dynastic phases in his discussions about

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[104] For biographical information about Wang Fuzhi, see Wang Zhichun 王之春, *Wang Fuzhi nianpu* 王夫之年譜 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989). For an overview of Wang Fuzhi's thought, see Liu JeeLoo, "Wang Fuzhi (Wang Fu-chih)," in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, 748-55.

[105] Wang Fuzhi, *Du tongjian lun* 讀通鑒論 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2003). This book consists of notes concerning Sima Guang's *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒.

[106] Wang Fuzhi, *Du tongjian lun*, 1106.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.

legitimacy. Wang Fuzhi goes further. He denies the validity of the dynastic phase by pointing out two relevant problems: (a) dynastic phases were frequently adopted by illegitimate dynasties to legitimate their rule, and (b) the theory behind the practice led to two contradictory progressions: Zou Yan's theory of dynastic phases suggests that each new phase "overcomes" its predecessor (the dynastical phases of the Xia, Shang, Zhou, and Qin dynasties proceeded in such a permutation), while Liu Xin's theory suggests that each phase "generates" its successor (dynasties subsequent to the Han adopted their dynastic phases by following that logic).

The third shortcoming is the erroneous premise of *zhengtong*. Wang Fuzhi details two supposed premises: the central realm should be united and the succession of legitimate dynasties should be continuous.[109] Previous sections show that Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang stressed the unification of the central realm when discussing legitimacy, while Wang Tong and his followers supported a continuous succession. To invalidate these two premises, Wang Fuzhi describes three phases in China's history.

The first phase was when the central realm changed from division to unification. Wang Fuzhi argues that ever since the legendary sage rulers (such as Yao and Shun) united the central realm, a series of dynasties (from the beginning to the Zhou Dynasty) inherited the rule of their predecessors and kept the central realm unified.[110] During this period, the two premises of the *zhengtong* fitted historical reality.[111]

The second phase was when the central realm fell into a cycle of division and unification.[112] After the Zhou Dynasty collapsed, the central realm fragmentized. Various regional states emerged and fought each other until the Qin Dynasty established its unifying rule over the central realm.[113] Similar scenarios happened repeatedly in the later period. Once a united dynasty collapsed, various states appeared and dominated parts of the central realm. Then dynasties such as the Han, Jin, Sui, Tang, and Song gradually arose and eventually united the central realm. These dynasties established their unifying rule after years of combat with competitors, rather than directly replacing an earlier unified dynasty.[114] The historical mode during this period can be seen as a cycle of division and unification. This mode directly contradicts the premise of *zhengtong* since the central realm during this period did not

[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid. Sima Guang had a similar view, as we saw in Section 5.1.2.2.
[112] Ibid., 1107.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

remain unified all the time and the unifying dynasties did not follow immediately upon each other.

The third phase was when the central realm, rather than repeatedly alternating between division and unification, was ruled by a series of unified dynasties.[115] The collapse of the Southern Song did not cause the central realm to become fragmentized. The Yuan Dynasty directly replaced the Song Dynasty and became the ruler of the entire central realm.[116] Similarly, the Ming and Qing dynasties directly seized their rules from the previous, united dynasties. However, Wang Fuzhi, notably, describes both the Yuan and the Qing dynasties as illegitimate due to their "barbarian" rulers and views only the Ming Dynasty as legitimate. He argues that this contradicts the premise of *zhengtong*, because only the Ming Dynasty was a unified and legitimate dynasty, although it had no relation to prior or subsequent unified yet illegitimate dynasties.

These observations about three phases in China's history not only reveal the complex realities of rule, conquest, succession, abdication, division, and unification in Chinese history, but also demonstrate the failure of the premises of *zhengtong*. In other words, Wang Fuzhi avers both the idea that the central realm did not necessarily remain united and that a continuous succession of legitimate dynasties did not exist.

The above three deficiencies indicate that the term *zhengtong* fails to be a valid concept in discussing legitimacy, allowing Wang Fuzhi to introduce two others: *zhitong* and *daotong*. Wang Fuzhi adopts these two terms to discuss legitimacy.

The term *zhitong* literally means "succession of rulers." Wang Fuzhi uses this term to refer to a lineage of legitimate rulers in history. He argues that only those rulers who had immense virtue and achieved great accomplishments were entitled to be considered legitimate. Wang Fuzhi continues by stating that since all legitimate rulers in history ruled virtuously, they could form a succession, even if their reigns did not follow one another.[117] Hence, *zhitong* is a discontinuous succession that includes only the successful rulers from the Shang, Zhou, Han, Tang, and Song dynasties.[118] It is not surprising to see that this *zhitong* does not include any ruler of the Period of Disunion. On the one hand, Wang Fuzhi shares Zheng Sixiao's view that non-Chinese

[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Wang Fuzhi, *Du tongjian lun*, 13. 408-09.
[118] Ibid., 22.779-81. Wang Fuzhi must have viewed Ming rulers as eligible members of *zhitong*, although he does not mention them in this book.

rulers have barbarous natures that prevent them from achieving virtuous and legitimate rulership.[119] He even provides a metaphor, asserting that Emperor Xiaowen, the allegedly successful Northern Wei ruler, adopted Chinese customs like a monkey wearing a crown to present itself as human.[120] On the other hand, since all the Southern Dynasties had a usurpation-based foundation and few of them had virtuous monarchs, Wang Fuzhi's *zhitong* excludes rulers of the Southern Dynasties as well.[121]

The term *daotong* literally means "succession of the [Confucian] way." This term was quite popular in Neo-Confucianism and denotes the succession of Confucian masters who are fully familiar with Confucian moral principles. As Peter Bol points out, Zhu Xi had already used this term in his discussion about legitimacy.[122] Richard Davis also points out that this term was first popularized by the Song scholar Li Yuangang 李元綱 (12th century), in which the Confucian Way is depicted as being transferred from Confucius and Mencius to a series of Northern Song scholars, such as Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-1073), Chen Hao 程顥 (1032-1085), Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1108) and other Neo-Confucian masters.[123] Wang Fuzhi argues that the succession of the Confucian Way accompanies and supports the succession of rulers.[124] He also suggests that a legitimate ruler should promote Confucianism and thereby receive support from Confucian masters to support his legitimacy.[125] No scholars from the Period of Disunion are included in this succession.

In summary, Wang Fuzhi deconstructs the term *zhengtong* by pointing out three deep-seated shortcomings of that term. To discuss legitimacy and the legitimacy disputes, he introduces the terms *zhitong* and *daotong*. Since none of the rulers or scholars of the Northern Wei or the Southern dynasties met the *zhitong* and *daotong* criteria, these dynasties failed to be legitimate.

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[119] Ibid., 14.431.
[120] Ibid., 17. 576. A similar and interesting metaphor can be found in Dutch, namely "geef een aap een gouden ring, het is en blijft een lelijk ding" (if you give a monkey a golden ring, it still remains an ugly thing, i.e. animal).
[121] Ibid., 22.780. Wang Fuzhi offers high praise to the Liu Song Dynasty for their resistance of the "barbarian" Northern Wei. Ibid., 15.477-78.
[122] Bol says, "Zhu Xi himself argued that there was a separate line of authority over the Way outside rulership; he and his successors called this the 'Succession of the Way' (*daotong*) […] The *daotong* thus came to stand alongside the older political term for a 'correct succession' (*zhengtong*) of dynasties that were 'legitimate' successors to the sage -kings of antiquity as possessors of heaven's mandate." See Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 132.
[123] Richard Davis**,** "Historiography as Politics," 48.
[124] Wang Fuzhi, *Du tongjian lun*, 13.408-09.
[125] Ibid., 15. 497.

5.2.2.2. Liang Qichao

The criticisms of traditional Chinese views on legitimacy reached the peak at the end of 19th century, when China encountered severe challenges from the West. Liang Qichao was arguably the most influential person to question the term *zhengtong* and introduce Western ideas into the discussion about legitimacy.

In 1890 when Liang failed the "Metropolitan Graduate" national examinations in Beijing, he became a disciple of Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927), a distinguished reformer of the Qing Dynasty. Soon afterwards, in 1898, he participated in the famous "Hundred Days' Reform" (*wuxu bianfa* 戊戌變法) and fled to Japan after it failed.[126] In 1902, while in exile in Japan, he wrote an essay titled "Lun zhengtong" 論正統 (Discourse on Legitimacy) to express his views on traditional Chinese discussions on legitimacy.[127] In this essay Liang Qichao primarily points out six questionable "proofs" of legitimacy supposed by the term *zhengtong*, and explains how these supposed proofs became popular. This essay ends with an introduction to the relevance of Western ideas of constitutional monarchy to the issue of legitimacy and the conclusion that no dynasty, including the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties, possessed real legitimacy.

In the beginning of his essay, Liang stresses his total rejection of the term *zhengtong*, saying "among the mistakes of Chinese historians, none is graver than the discussion of *zhengtong*" 中國史家之謬, 未有過於言正統者也.[128] Liang notes that the six popular substantiations of legitimacy that were adopted by previous scholars are questionable, namely the occupation of a large territory;[129] a long reign;[130] the same ruling house as the previous dynasty;[131] the same capital as the previous dynasty;[132] an allegedly legitimate successor;[133] and a Chinese ruling house.[134] Liang

[126] For biographical information about Liang Qichao and an overview of his thoughts, see Joseph Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970).
[127] This essay is included in the corpus of Liang Qichao's writings, *Yinbingshi heji* 飲冰室合集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989).
[128] Ibid., 9.20.
[129] Ibid., 9.21. Liang Qichao gives the example that the Yuan Dynasty is viewed as legitimate since it occupied the largest territory in China's history.
[130] Ibid. Liang argues that since the Xin Dynasty 新朝 (9-23) had a short reigning period, few scholars in history viewed that dynasty as legitimate.
[131] Ibid. The Eastern Jin and the Southern Song are allegedly legitimate, according to this evidence, as Liang asserts.
[132] Ibid. As Liang points out, both the Cao Wei and the Five Dynasties are viewed as legitimate by some scholars since they shared the capital with their previous dynasties. The Northern Wei is a similar case, since this dynasty transferred the capital to Luoyang.

continues by pointing out numerous contradictions of these substantiations. If one accepts the first one and confirms a dynasty's *zhengtong* due to the size of its territory (shared by Gao Lüe and Li Yanshou), two widely recognized illegitimate dynasties in previous scholars' views, the Former Qin and Jurchen Jin dynasties, should be treated as *zhengtong* due to their substantial accumulation of territory.[135] The second verification, that of the extensive duration of a reign (used by Li Yanshou and Zhang Fangping), is similarly problematic. For instance, it fails to explain why two supposedly illegitimate dynasties, the Northern Wei and the Western Xia, had longer reigns than the ostensibly legitimate dynasties of their times, the Southern Dynasties and the Northern Song respectively.[136] The third piece of evidence, that of having the same ruling house as the previous dynasty (mentioned by Shen Yue and Huangfu Shi), does not enable one to explain why the ancient state of Song 宋, where the Shang Dynasty nobles resided after their dynasty was sacked by the Zhou, as not considered *zhengtong* by previous scholars.[137] The fourth criterion, in terms of which a dynasty is seen as legitimate due to its having an appropriate capital, is also problematic. According to this evidence, two supposedly illegitimate dynasties, the Northern Wei and the Jurchen Jin, should be viewed as legitimate since they both shared capitals with preceding dynasties, the Western Jin and the Northern Song Dynasty respectively. The fifth indicator of legitimacy (as used by Li Yanshou) is that a dynasty could be viewed as *zhengtong* because of its well-acknowledged legitimate predecessor. This determinant does not enable one to explain why the supposedly illegitimate Northern Wei had a legitimate successor, the Tang Dynasty. The last one, of having a Chinese ruling house (used by Zheng Sixiao and Fang Xiaoru), is contradicted by the fact that the Five Dynasties were viewed as legitimate by most previous scholars although three of them had non-Chinese rulers.[138] In conclusion, these six indicators, which were used by many scholars mentioned in this dissertation, do not provide any indisputable criterion of legitimacy.

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[133] Ibid. Many scholars describe the Sui Dynasty as legitimate since the allegedly legitimate Tang Dynasty succeeded the abdicated ruler of the Sui Dynasty.
[134] Ibid. Liang argues that the southern dynasties have to be viewed as legitimate if this criterion is adopted.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] After the Zhou Dynasty was founded, elites of the preceding Shang Dynasty were given land that was later to become the state of Song 宋國 (11th century BCE-286 BCE).
[138] Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji*, 9.21.

Liang Qichao also investigates why the six criteria of legitimacy became popular. The first reason, he argues, derives from scholars' selfish desires to support their own dynasties' legitimacy. Liang asserts that historians such as Wei Shou, Shen Yue, and Li Yanshou supported their own dynasty's legitimacy by introducing various questionable factors, such as a large territory and a Chinese ruling house, into their arguments regarding the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute. Similarly, various Southern Song thinkers firmly supported the Eastern Jin's legitimacy.[139]

The second reason was that scholars tried to flatter their rulers by inventing dubious factors regarding legitimacy, for example, that the central realm needed a sage and rightful ruler at any given time, and that there should not be two rightful rulers at the same time.[140] As Liang explains, if at one point there was no identifiable qualified ruler, scholars would have had to settle on the least unqualified one among all candidates (including usurpers, thieves, and barbarians) in order to demonstrate the first assumption. If there were more than one candidate for the position of rightful ruler, scholars in history would have had to support their rulers by denigrating other candidates as illegitimate in order as to demonstrate the second assumption.

After demonstrating the invalidity of previous views on *zhengtong*, Liang considers the paradox beneath these views. His essay shows that previous views on *zhengtong* actually rendered no dynasty in history legitimate. A "barbarian" dynasty, as scholars believed, especially those in the Southern Song and Ming dynasties, could not be viewed as legitimate. Therefore, the Northern Wei, the Five Dynasties, the Khitan Liao, the Jurchen Jin, and the Yuan Dynasty were not qualified to be legitimate.[141] Since various scholars defined dynasties established by usurpation as illegitimate, the Cao Wei, the Jin Dynasty, the Southern Dynasties, the Sui, the Tang, and the Song could not be viewed as legitimate.[142] Finally, since "burglars" could not be viewed as legitimate, even the Han and the Ming dynasty become illegitimate.[143] The result is that, throughout the entirety of the two thousand years since the collapse of the Zhou Dynasty, no dynasty qualified to be legitimate.

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[139] Ibid., 9.23-24.
[140] Ibid., 9.24.
[141] Ibid., 9.21.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid. Historical records note that the founders of the Han and the Ming dynasties were vagrants ("burglars") in their early life and hence, according to Liang Qichao, could not found a legitimate dynasty.

What constitutes a legitimate regime in Liang Qichao's view? At the end of his essay, he stresses that a legitimate regime is one that has a constitutional monarchy, as in Britain and Japan.[144] In a constitutional monarchy, once rulers ascend to the throne, they must vow to respect the constitution and to devote themselves to serve their people. Liang indicates that rather than the Mandate of Heaven, the ruler's morality, or any other invented symbol of legitimacy, only upholding the constitution gives a ruler legitimacy.[145] Given the absence of a constitution for most of China's history, it is clear that no dynasty in China's history, including the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties, was legitimate, according to Liang Qichao.

In short, in order to deconstruct the term *zhengtong*, Liang Qichao points out six mistakes embedded in previous views of that term, which had been frequently introduced by scholars to discuss the Northern Wei's legitimacy. He argues that the term had been used to support Chinese monarchs' autocratic rule. It is hence meaningless to discuss whether the Northern Wei or the Southern Dynasties possessed *zhengtong*. Introducing Western constitutional monarchy, he indicates that a legitimate ruler should follow the constitution and devote himself to serving his people.

5.3 Conclusion

In the mid-18th century, Qing Dynasty scholars were commissioned to compile the largest collection of books in Chinese history, the *Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete Library in Four Sections). Scholars soon encountered a troublesome question relating to Yang Weizhen's 楊維楨 (1296-1370) essay, "Zhengtong bian" 正統辨 (Disputation about Rightful Succession), in which the writer insisted that the legitimate succession of dynasties went through the Northern Song to the Southern Song, and then to the Yuan Dynasty, entirely bypassing the Khitan Liao and Jurchen Jin dynasties.[146] The Qing scholars appreciated this essay because, similarly to Yang Weizhen, they viewed their dynasty, which also had non-Chinese rulers and united the central realm, as legitimate. However, Yang Weizhen also fiercely rejected the legitimacy of all other non-Chinese dynasties, especially the Jurchen Jin, which in Qing times was seen as

[144] Ibid., 9. 25.
[145] Ibid., 9.25-26.
[146] See Rao Zongyi, *Zhongguo shixue*, 134-138. Richard Davis offers a detailed study of Yang Weizhen and attaches an English translation of the "Polemic on Legitimate Succession." See Richard Davis, "Historiography as Politics," 51-72.

the ancestral predecessor of the Qing Dynasty.[147] Qing scholars hence suggested excluding Yang Weizhen's essay from the *Siku Quanshu*.[148]

Interestingly, in an edict to his officials, the Qianlong Emperor 乾隆帝 (1735-1795) firmly supported Yang Weizhen's essay and continued by describing his dynasty as the legitimate successor of the Ming Dynasty, rather than the Jurchen Jin.[149] Moreover, the Qianlong Emperor also pronounced his view on previous legitimacy disputes, arguing that the Southern Dynasties and the Song Dynasty – rather than the Northern Wei, the Khitan Liao, and the Jurchen Jin – were legitimate due to their adoption of moral rule, despite their ethnicity. The emperor concluded by describing his own Qing as the most legitimate dynasty in Chinese history since it fully met most standards of legitimacy mentioned by scholars, such as the possession of the Mandate of Heaven, the adoption of moral rule, and dominance over the central realm.[150] This case indicates that even in late-imperial China, rulers and scholars still had an interest in the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute, and the moral criterion played a crucial role in discussing legitimacy.

In this chapter three stages of discussions about the Northern Wei legitimacy dispute, from the Northern Song Dynasty onwards, were discussed. In the first stage, scholars either subscribed to Wang Tong's conceptions when discussing legitimacy, such as Zhang Fangping and Chen Shidao, or introduced their own conception of *zhengtong* into the discussion about legitimacy, such as Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang. These two followers of Wang Tong supported the Northern Wei's legitimate status by promoting this dynasty's rulers as legitimate "Chinese" monarchs due to their adoption of Confucian political principles, occupation of the central realm, and other factors. The last two scholars understood *zhengtong* in terms of virtuous rule and the unification of the central realm. They not only denied the legitimacy of both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties, but also questioned factors such as abdication, the dynastic phases, and the virtuosity of rulers as determinants of legitimacy.

In the second stage, scholars introduced Neo-Confucian ideas into the legitimacy discussion. The typical Chinese chauvinist Zheng Sixiao subscribed to

[147] The members of the ruling class of the Qing Dynasty, the Manchu people, are close descendants of the Jurchen people. Therefore, the Manchu people originally named their regime the Late Jin 後金.
[148] *Siku quanshu*, 1040. 411.
[149] Ibid., 1040. 411-15.
[150] Ibid., 1040. 414.

both the moral and ethnic criteria of legitimacy, and determined that having a Chinese ruler and displaying moral rule were two prerequisites of a legitimate status. Fang Xiaoru highlighted so-called Heavenly principles instead. Both scholars came to the conclusion that the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties were illegitimate, the former due to its "barbarian" rulers and the latter for usurping the throne.

In the last stage, scholars strove to deconstruct the term *zhengtong* and displayed a negative attitude toward the legitimacy of the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties and in fact most if not all other dynasties. According to Wang Fuzhi's arguments, the origin, application, and premises of the term *zhengtong* were disgraceful and questionable. Legitimacy, in his view, was ensured by the succession of an accomplished ruler and Confucianism. Liang Qichao argued that previous views of *zhengtong*, which related to geographical, historical and ethnic criteria, were invalid. Only the adoption of Western constitutional monarchy could ensure legitimacy.