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

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Citation

Liu, P. (2018, April 25). *Political legitimacy in Chinese history : the case of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-535)*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/61623>

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Issue Date: 2018-04-25

Summary

The Northern Wei Dynasty 北魏 (386-535), founded by a non-Chinese ethnic group, competed with a series of Chinese ruling houses, collectively referred to as the Southern Dynasties 南朝 (420-589), in being perceived as the legitimate rulers of China. Scholars throughout Chinese history weighed in on the question of which side should be considered legitimate: the Northern Wei, the Southern Dynasties, neither, or both? This dissertation analyzes political legitimacy in Chinese history, with the Northern Wei as a case study. First it provides a historical background of the legitimacy dispute (chapter 1). It continues to analyze the various legitimation practices adopted by the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties (chapter 2). The dissertation then continues by studying, in chronological order, fourteen pre-modern Chinese scholars' views on the legitimacy of the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties (chapter 3, 4, and 5). With reference to the legitimacy dispute between the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties, this dissertation not only investigates practical criteria of legitimacy, which can be classified as cosmological, moral, historical, ethnic, and geographical, but also describes the evolution and disintegration of traditional Chinese views of legitimacy (chapter 6).

