

Origins, Ancestors, and Imperial Authority in Early Northern Wei Historiography

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2015

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ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation, I explore *Wei shu* historiography on the early Northern Wei imperial state, which was founded by the Tuoba Xianbei in the late fourth century C.E. In examining the *Wei shu* narrative of the Northern Wei founding, I illuminate not only the representation of cultural and imperial authority in the reigns of the early Northern Wei emperors, but also investigate historiography on the pre-imperial Tuoba past. I argue that the *Wei shu* narrative of Tuoba origins and ancestors is constructed from the perspective of the moment of the Northern Wei founding. Or, to view it the other way around, the founding of the Northern Wei imperial state by Tuoba Gui signifies the culmination of the *Wei shu* narrative on the early Tuoba.

This narrative of the early Tuoba past is of course teleological: Essentially everything in this phase of Tuoba historiography leads up to the moment of the Northern Wei imperial founding, including genealogical descent from a son of Huangdi, who is represented as the Xianbei progenitor, in a remote northern wilderness; the continuous succession of Tuoba rulers that followed; and the journeys that brought the Tuoba out of the wilderness and toward the geographical center.

In focusing on the account of the inaugural reign of Tuoba Gui, the Northern Wei founder, and the record of his ritual practice as emperor, I have discovered tensions in

Wei shu historiography that I believe signal toward some of the actual cultural contestation that attended the founding of the Northern Wei imperial state. The *Wei shu* historiography on Buddhism in the early Northern Wei then, I argue, presents an alternative source of authority, one that stands outside both an imperial Han inheritance and a culturally Tuoba tradition.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is difficult to imagine writing a dissertation of this kind in an institution other than the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia University. EALAC granted me a firm foundation in the fields of Premodern Chinese literature and cultural history, and then allowed me to pursue a project that blurs disciplinary boundaries. I owe my deepest gratitude to my two advisors, Shang Wei and Robert Hymes, who both read this manuscript with thoughtfulness and care. Shang Wei graciously offered his guidance throughout the process of conceptualizing and writing this project, and his breadth of knowledge is a source of continual inspiration. Robert Hymes generously shared his expertise on social history of early medieval China, and offered astute recommendations for revision of the manuscript. I am also indebted to my other dissertation committee members Charles Holcombe, Michael Puett, and David Lurie, each of whom provided a unique critical perspective and much constructive advice. Al Dien provided comments on a presentation which was based on a draft of chapter 1.

I am grateful to Haruo Shirane for generously dispensing sound advice throughout the course of my doctoral studies at Columbia University. I am also grateful to Wendy Swartz for her comments on an early proposal for this project and for her seminars on *Shijing* and early medieval poetry, and to Li Feng for his lively seminar on history and archaeology of early China.

My classmates in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, especially Linda Rui Feng, Gregory Patterson, and Nan Ma Hartmann, shared their clever

wit and warm companionship, and I am indebted to Linda for reading drafts of chapters even while preparing her own book manuscript for publication.

Funding to support my dissertation research was provided by a Fulbright fellowship to Taiwan for the academic year 2010–2011. I would like to thank National Taiwan University for hosting a productive stay, and in particular Cheng Yu-yu in the Department of Chinese Literature and Chen Jo-shui in the Department of History. Adventures with my fellow Fulbrighters Veronica Wong, Kim Liao, and Erin Shigekawa exploring the cafes and bookshops of Taipei made the experience all the richer.

At the dissertation writing stage, David Schaberg's seminar on *Zuo Zhuan* that I audited at UCLA was immensely inspiring, and allowed me to think about historiography in ways both critical and creative. I am also most grateful to Jack Chen for several productive conversations about this dissertation project.

My parents, Jan, Martin, and Eve, have been a constant source of support and motivation throughout my doctoral education. Finally, my gratitude is owed to Torquil, who intuitively believed in this project even at moments when it seemed to go astray. Thank you for patiently reading drafts of the manuscript and for cooking dinner almost every evening.

Introduction

The Project

At the close of the fourth century (in 398 C.E.), Tuoba Gui 拓跋珪, the ruler of the Tuoba Xianbei, proclaimed the founding of the (Northern) Wei imperial state and formally accepted the insignia of emperor, acceding as Taizu 太祖, Emperor Daowu 道武, according to the *Wei shu*. Earlier that year, Tuoba Gui had fulfilled each of the requisite acts attendant at the founding of an imperial state. He formally accepted the mandate of heaven, held deliberations with his ministers on the name of the imperial state, built the new capital of Pingcheng, erected therein the ancestral temple and the altars of soil and grain, and further, instituted an array of new imperial rituals to be performed by the Tuoba emperors of the Northern Wei.

The elevation of the Northern Wei from kingdom to imperium (Tuoba Gui had previously declared himself king of the Wei state, which thereby supplanted the predecessor state of Dai) signified both Tuoba Gui's personal ambitions as ruler and his aspirations for the regime he led. The founding of the imperial Northern Wei state laid the groundwork for the eventual conquests of the surrounding states, and within only about four decades, by the mid-fifth century, the Northern Wei would effectively unify the north under its imperial rule.

The focal point of this dissertation is the *Wei shu* narrative of the founding of the imperial Northern Wei state through the inaugural reign of Tuoba Gui, or Emperor Daowu. I explore the deeply interconnected issues of cultural and imperial authority at this moment of the Northern Wei founding, as represented in *Wei shu* historiography.

Through an examination of *Wei shu* accounts of Emperor Daowu's practice of imperial ritual, tensions emerge in the text between an avowed adherence to Zhou–Han textual prescriptions and vestiges of culturally Tuoba traditional practice. Moreover, the accounts preserve a record of ritual performance that cannot be categorized as following either tradition. I not only investigate ritual practice in Emperor Daowu's reign, but also trace the history of ritual practice through the ensuing reigns of the Northern Wei emperors.

Although the focal point of my dissertation is the founding of the Northern Wei, this moment is refracted across *Wei shu* historiography on the early Tuoba, as it is from the perspective of the imperial Northern Wei founding that the origins, early history, and lineage of the Tuoba were constructed. Significantly, only at the inauguration of the Northern Wei imperial state were the five imperial ancestors enshrined as past emperors. The *Wei shu* narrative traces the Tuoba from their genealogical and territorial origins, throughout their journeys as they emerge from a wilderness, and into the formation of the Dai state. This phase of pre-imperial Tuoba history is written in the “Prefatory Annals” (序紀) of the *Wei shu*, and aspects of this history are also incorporated into the “Lingzheng zhi” 靈徵志 (“Treatise on Auspicious and Inauspicious Influences”).

This project also moves forward in time from the moment of the Northern Wei imperial founding to examine *Wei shu* historiography on Buddhism during the reigns of the early Northern Wei emperors. I explore Buddhism as an alternative source of imperial authority, and trace the arc of the historiographical narrative from imperial accommodation through persecution and finally to restoration. I argue that this narrative illuminates issues of acculturation and cultural authority during the early Northern Wei, and also poses an interesting case of the writing and rewriting of history in the *Wei shu*.

The parameters of this dissertation therefore encompass the historiographical representation of the earliest history of the Tuoba clan through the reigns of the first five emperors of the Northern Wei imperial state.

The Text

The historiographical text that treats the Tuoba Xianbei and the Northern Wei is the *Wei shu* (魏書, *History of the Northern Wei*). The history was compiled by Wei Shou 魏收 (505–572 C.E.) under the command of the founding emperor of the Northern Qi, which had succeeded the Eastern Wei, in the mid-sixth century C.E., and the final text was presented in 554 C.E., though it subsequently underwent revision. The structure of the text, in one hundred and thirty chapters (卷), follows the composite annals–biography style (*jizhuan ti* 紀傳體), and incorporates ten treatises (*zhi* 志), two of which were innovations by Wei Shou.

The earliest source text for the *Wei shu* annals section (which is referred to in the *Wei shu* as the “Imperial Annals,” or “Diji” 帝紀) was the *Annals of Dai* (*Dai ji* 代紀), compiled by Deng Yuan 鄧淵 at the command of the Northern Wei founder, Tuoba Gui. The *Annals of Dai* historiography broadly corresponds with the “Prefatory Annals” chapter (“Xuji” 序紀) in the *Wei shu*, and covers the history of the Tuoba from their earliest origins through the founding of the Northern Wei. Throughout the Northern Wei regime, the history of the state was continually recorded, and toward the end of the Northern Wei, Wei Shou himself participated in the compilation of the *History of the*

State (*Guo shi* 國史), which was later incorporated into the *Wei shu*.¹ In light of its textual history, I consider the transmitted *Wei shu* as a stratified text, as the annals and biographies were compiled cumulatively throughout the course of the Northern Wei and into the Northern Qi, or over a period of over a century and a half, while the treatises were authored by Wei Shou only at the end of this process, after the completion of the other two sections.

Historical Context

The Tuoba Xianbei emerged in a historical period conventionally described in the epigrammatic phrase *wu Hu luan Hua* (五胡亂華), or “the five *Hu* (nomadic tribes of from the north) lay waste to the *Hua* (Huaxia 華夏; central cultural region).” The phrase evokes a violent disruption of the normative political order by savage interlopers running amok across the land. Subsumed within the collective designation *wu Hu* are the Xiongnu 匈奴, Xianbei 鮮卑, Di 氐, Qiang 羌, and Jie 羯, though the assignation of ethnic origin in this period is fraught with difficulty.²

As the (Western) Jin court succumbed to brutal internecine succession conflict toward the end of the third century and into the early fourth C.E., a chieftain of the

¹ For discussion of the textual history of the *Wei shu*, see Tang Changru, et al., editors’ preface in the modern edition of the *Wei shu*, 1–6; Holmgren, *Annals of Tai: To-pa History According to the First Chapter of the Wei-shu*, 14–18; Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 89–90; 102–106.

² Originally, *Hu* referred specifically to the Xiongnu. Later, a directional indicator was added to the term, to form designations such as Eastern *Hu* and Western *Hu*. The collective term *wu Hu* derives from the historiographical work that treats the regimes of this eponymous period of the Sixteen Kingdoms, the *Shiluguo Chunqiu* 十六國春秋, compiled by Cui Hong 崔鴻, and extant only in fragments. A mnemonic for the names of the sixteen states is: “5 Liangs, 4 Yans, 3 Qins, 2 Zhaos, plus Cheng and Xia make 16” (五涼，四燕，三秦，二趙，并成，夏為十六).

southern Xiongnu and descendant of the Xiongnu *shanyu* named Liu Yuan 劉淵 rebelled in Bingzhou 并州 (in modern western Shanxi province)³ and proclaimed himself king of Han in 304 C.E. In addition to his Xiongnu patrimony, Liu Yuan also claimed descent on his maternal side from the founder of the Han dynasty, Liu Bang, by virtue of generations of marriage alliances between Xiongnu and Han royal daughters, and on that basis invoked the restoration of the original Han dynasty.⁴ Four years later, he promoted himself to emperor of Han, performed sacrifices to each of the past Han emperors, and established a capital at Pingyang 平陽 in the lower valley of the Fen River. It was this regime, the Xiongnu-ruled Han (304–318 C.E.) that seized the Jin capital Luoyang in 311 C.E. (though Liu Yuan himself had died prior to the attack). Another Liu-surnamed Xiongnu, Liu Yao 劉曜, later captured Chang’an in 316 C.E., to which the surviving remnants of the Jin imperial court had fled, and soon thereafter declared the founding of the (Former) Zhao 趙 (318–329 C.E.), with its capital at Chang’an, securely situated in the central region of Guanzhong.⁵

It was the rise of this Xiongnu-ruled state of Han–Zhao that opened the historical phase known as *wu Hu luan Hua*. Although it only endured for two and a half decades,

³ Liu Yuan’s initial power base was located within Jin territory (though barely), in Lishi 離石, near the western border of Bingzhou 并州.

⁴ For more on Liu Yuan, see Honey, *The Rise of the Medieval Hsiung-nu: The Biography of Liu Yüan*.

⁵ The fact that historians refer to Han–Zhao as a unitary Xiongnu dynasty glosses over the violent succession disputes that attended each transfer of power. As Lewis writes, “the designated heirs of the Xiongnu Han state that drove the Jin out of the north were murdered in 310 (one year before occupying Luoyang) and again in 318. The second murder led to a massacre of much of the ruling family, which ended when the survivor, Liu Yao, moved the capital to Chang’an and changed the name of this state from Han to Zhao.” Lewis, *China Between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties*, 74. On the Han–Zhao state, see also Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900*, 56.

and suffered from internal instability throughout, the regime was the first in a succession of *Hu*-led states to exercise sovereignty in the core of civilization, the Wei river valley. It nominally controlled former Jin territory in the areas of modern southern and central Shanxi, as well as the region of Guanzhong, ruling over the various ethnicities that populated these areas. But as scholars have rightly pointed out, the founder of this state, Liu Yuan, far from being a northern nomad from beyond the pale, had actually been hosted by the Jin as an official guest in the capital Luoyang, where he became well versed in ancient military texts. Indeed, this would become a pattern among the early northern regimes. As Mark Edward Lewis has rightly observed, the fragility of such states was “exacerbated by the fact that...[they] were founded by nomads who had been resettled inside China, grown up there, and either served the Jin court or been Jin conscripts. In contrast with the earlier Xiongnu and some later confederations, they had no base outside of China and no distinct political tradition. They were little more than temporary assemblages of fighting men.”⁶

The devastation of the (Western) Jin, which came with the cataclysmic fall of its two capitals Luoyang and Chang’an, forced its scattered remnants to undertake a southward exodus, crossing the Yangzi river into the region formerly occupied by the state of Wu during the Three Kingdoms era. The émigré Jin court, dislodged from the geographical center of imperial authority and forced into the wilderness of the south, confronted an existential crisis. As a regime in exile, its authority to rule would have to be predicated on a foundation other than territorial occupation of the traditional cultural

⁶ Lewis, *China Between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties*, 73. For more on Liu Yuan’s background, see also Holcombe, *A History of East Asia: From the Origins of Civilization to the Twenty-First Century*, 60–61, and Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900*, 48–49; 54–57.

heartland. Ruled through a claim by an imperial heir of the Sima family, the restored Jin dynasty (known as Eastern Jin), situated its capital at Jiankang 建康 (formerly Jianye 建業, the Wu capital), which would serve as the capital for all of the succeeding southern dynasties. Though the Jin undertook attempts to re-conquer the north, they repeatedly failed, and they eventually considered the north as lost. Though the Eastern Jin survived for another century, its court was plagued by innumerable intrigues and threats from military commanders who were nominally in service to the state.⁷

The Xiongnu-ruled Han–Zhao met its demise at the hands of a military general named Shi Le 石勒 of Jie 羯 origin, who had once been allied with the Xiongnu regime.⁸ It has been conjectured that the Jie were Indo-European (most probably Iranian), as depictions of them include deep-set eyes, high noses, and bearded faces, and they were described as practicing Zoroastrianism.⁹ Originally settled among the Jie population in the Jin administered territory of Bingzhou, Shi Le had been captured along with other non-Han by the Jin governor and sold into slavery in the northeast. Eventually he escaped and fell in with an ethnically heterogeneous group of “mounted brigands,” and they plundered their way westward along the Yellow River and finally submitted, under Shi Le’s leadership, to Liu Yuan. Having nominally pledged his allegiance to the Xiongnu Han regime, he returned east. However, after Liu Yao came to power and relocated the

⁷ For an analysis of Eastern Jin cultural and intellectual history, see Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han*, especially chapters 2 and 3.

⁸ See Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900*, 57, and 74n13: “Whether Shi Le was really a Jie or a Xiongnu, and the exact nature of the relationship between the two, is still a matter of disagreement.” On Shi Le’s background, see also Honey, “Lineage as Legitimation,” 618–20.

⁹ See Lewis, *China Between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties*, 82–83; Jenner, *Memories of Luoyang*, 86n52.

(Former) Zhao capital to Chang'an, Shi Le moved to declare the founding of his own state of (Later) Zhao in 319 C.E. (319–350 C.E.), and situated its capital in Xiangguo 襄國, on the central plain.

The decisive military contestation between the Xiongnu (Former) Zhao and the Jie (Later) Zhao erupted around Luoyang and the Guanzhong region. Following a siege against Liu Yao's troops in the fortified city of Luoyang, Shi Le's armies captured Liu Yao, killed the heir apparent, and destroyed the dynasty (in 329 C.E.), winning territorial control of most of the north, from Bingzhou and Guanzhong in the west throughout the entire central plain in the east, and southward to the boundary of the Huai River. Though ostensibly ruling these areas, David Graff notes that Shi Le's state of (Later) Zhao "did not enjoy nearly the same degree of administrative control over its territory that earlier Chinese dynasties had done; its institutional foundations were extremely weak."¹⁰ Shi Hu 石虎, the (Later) Zhao general who seized power soon after Shi Le's death (in 333 C.E.), bore the reputation of an extremely brutal ruler, of little moral virtue, and many vices. He allegedly slaughtered not only his heir apparent, but also that man's consort and twenty-six children and buried them in a single coffin.¹¹

As in the original Xiongnu-led Han–Zhao state, succession in the Jie-led (Later) Zhao was also rife with violent conflict. Following Shi Hu's death (in 349 C.E.), the (Later) Zhao court degenerated into a series of violent succession conflicts, until an ethnically Han man named Shi Min 石閔, the adopted son of Shi Hu, emerged out of the

¹⁰ Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900*, 58.

¹¹ For an account of Shi Hu and the atrocities attributed to his rule, see *Jin shu* 106.2761; 106.2767; 106.2772; and *Jin shu* 107.

wreckage of the dynasty to extinguish the remaining members of the Shi lineage. The (Later) Zhao officially ceased to exist at its capital of Ye 鄴 in 350 C.E.,¹² when, after massacring the Shi-surnamed lineage, Ran Min 冉閔 (who by then had restored his original Han surname) declared the founding of the state of Wei 魏 (350–352 C.E.), and undertook a purge of Jie and indeed all non-Han living in the area. As Graff characterizes it, Ran Min “asserted a bitter and vengeful Han identity and initiated a genocidal campaign against all of the barbarians in and around Ye.”¹³ Answering the appeals for military assistance from non-Han troops within the vicinity of Ye, the Murong Xianbei ventured out from their territorial base in the northeast to capture and kill Ran Min, and thus snuff out the extremely short-lived Ran–Wei state.

The Murong Xianbei 慕容鮮卑 regime of (Former) Yan 燕 (337–370 C.E.), a relatively stable state, meanwhile, continued its territorial expansion westward and southward under its emperor Murong Jun 慕容儁 throughout the mid-fourth century until eventually its borders reached the Huai river (the boundary with the Eastern Jin), and it occupied the far western former capital Luoyang. Its annexation of these territories brought it into conflict with the (Former) Qin 秦 regime (350–394 C.E.), ruled by the ethnic-Di 氐 Fu Jian 苻堅, and based in the Wei river valley. It was this (Former) Qin state that attacked and destroyed the (Former) Yan, as well as the northwestern Liang 涼

¹² The (Later) Zhao had moved their capital from Xiangguo to Ye in 335 C.E.

¹³ Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900*, 62–63. See *Jin shu* 107.2791–2792 and *Jin shu* 107.2788–94. The slaughter carried out by Ran Min of non-Han ethnic populations is strong evidence that ethnic difference was both meaningful and highly relevant in this period, contrary to the view of some modern historians, who insist that such a concept cannot be productively applied to the premodern era.

state, and the Tuoba state of Dai 代. Indeed, the (Former) Qin even briefly unified all of north China under its rule by 381 C.E., then advanced southward against the (Eastern) Jin, in a battle that would prove decisive in Jin's favor, ultimately disrupting the Qin regime.¹⁴ Finally, in the aftermath of Fu Jian's collapse, two other Yan states arose, each ruled by Murong Xianbei leaders (known as Later Yan and Western Yan), and one led by ethnic Qiang 羌 in the region of Chang'an (known as Later Qin).

The extremely tumultuous era in the north that I have sketched in this overview, made up of an ever-shifting mosaic of tribal confederations and regimes, was the historical background for the emergence of the Tuoba Xianbei state of Dai. Within this context in the late fourth century, the Tuoba state of Dai might have been relegated to the same comparative obscurity of the other ephemeral regimes described in the foregoing discussion. The imperial state of Northern Wei that succeeded Dai, however, would prove singular among the *Hu*-ruled states to arise in this period, as the Tuoba Xianbei would not only conquer the north but would form an imperial polity that ruled for nearly a century and a half, through a succession of thirteen emperors.¹⁵

Organization

The arrangement of this dissertation is admittedly atypical. The dissertation is composed of two parts. Part I treats a pair of relatively early textual sources, the *San guo*

¹⁴ This is the famous battle of Fei river of 383 C.E., which proved disastrous for Fu Jian and his state of (Former) Qin.

¹⁵ For a careful analysis of the social and political structure of Tuoba administration, and consideration of possible reasons for the longevity of the Northern Wei state, see Klein, "The Contributions of the Fourth Century Xianbei States to the Reunification of the Chinese Empire."

zhi and *Hou Han shu*, written after the fall of the Later Han, and from a perspective (culturally speaking) of the southern ethnically Han dynasties. Part II, comprising the much lengthier portion, focuses on the mid–sixth century text the *Wei shu*, or *History of the Northern Wei*. The division into these two parts is not only meant to draw attention to the chronological relationship among the primary sources, but more importantly is designed to emphasize the difference between the perspectives from which the texts were written.

Chapter 1 explores the earliest accounts of the Xianbei tribe, found in the *San guo zhi* (三國志; *History of the Three Kingdoms*) and its later commentary (三國志注; *Commentary on the History of the Three Kingdoms*); and the *Hou Han shu* (後漢書; *History of the Later Han*). The structure of these early accounts comprises an ethnography of the Xianbei, a narrative of early Xianbei history, and finally a moral judgment on the Xianbei by the historiographers. This chapter argues that the representation of the Xianbei as a northern other deploys a similar discourse as had earlier historiography on the Xiongnu, and toward a similar objective: to construct a cultural boundary between the Huaxia 華夏 realm and those beyond. Within this context, the Xianbei are presented as only the latest incarnation in a long succession of *yi* 夷.

Part II opens with a prologue that presents an extended close reading of the prefatory passage in the *Wei shu* “Imperial Annals.” This preface introduces a contrasting account of the geographical and genealogical origins of the Xianbei, one that asserts a lineage for the Tuoba deriving from Huangdi (the Yellow Thearch). The effect of the passage is to acknowledge the territorial origin of the Tuoba as a remote wilderness beyond the boundary of civilization, but then to forge a bloodline that leads directly back

to the founder of that cultural order. The preface of the *Wei shu* may therefore be understood as an answer to the earlier discourse on the Xianbei that casts them as the northern other.

Chapter 2 examines the narrative of early Tuoba Xianbei history found in the *Wei shu*. Focusing primarily on the opening (“Prefatory Annals,” “Xuji” 序紀) section of the “Imperial Annals” (“Diji” 第紀), the chapter traces the historiography of the origins of the Tuoba, then follows through the succession of the earliest Tuoba rulers and their territorial migrations, which finally culminates in the reign of Tuoba Shiyijian 拓跋什翼犍 (r. 338–376 C.E.), the grandfather of Tuoba Gui 拓跋珪. The account inscribes a process of transformation from tribe to state, while geographically, it chronicles the move from the remote wilderness toward territorial settlement. I argue that this narrative of early pre-imperial Tuoba history is conceived retrospectively from the moment of the Northern Wei founding. It is only following Tuoba Gui’s ascension to the position of emperor that the lineage of Tuoba imperial ancestors would be enshrined and that the territorial origins of the Tuoba were written.

Chapter 3 treats *Wei shu* historiography on Tuoba Gui’s reign and his founding of the Northern Wei imperial state. The chapter analyzes in detail records from the “Imperial Annals” section, the “Ritual Treatise” (“Lizhi” 禮志), the “Treatise on Auspicious and Inauspicious Influences” (“Lingzheng zhi” 靈徵志), as well as the “Treatise on Music” (“Yuezhi” 樂志), that represent Tuoba Gui’s rule as king of the pre-imperial state, and later his rule as the first emperor of the new imperial state of Northern Wei. The predominant concern in this chapter is the representation of imperial authority, and its intertwining with cultural authority. I argue that the accounts of ritual practice by

Tuoba Gui, Emperor Daowu, across these multiple sources within the *Wei shu*, preserve some of the tensions that attended the founding and early reigns of the new imperial state of the Tuoba.

Chapter 4 examines the interplay between the historiography of Buddhism and the representation of imperial authority during the reigns of the early Northern Wei emperors in the *Wei shu* accounts. In this chapter, I primarily treat the *Wei shu* “Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism,” the “Shi Lao zhi” (釋老志),¹⁶ a treatise of Wei Shou’s own invention. The narrative on Buddhism in the reigns of early rulers traces an arc from imperial accommodation, through proscription, and finally restoration. Based on an analysis of the rhetoric that rationalizes each of these acts, I dispute the conventional assumption that the appeal of Buddhism for the Northern Wei rulers lay in its foreignness.

In the epilogue, I examine the *Wei shu* narrative of an imperially sanctioned journey by a Northern Wei official to sacrifice at the Xianbei *shishi* (石室), a remote cave site believed at the time to be an ancient Tuoba ancestral temple. The invocation spoken by this official is preserved in the *Wei shu* account, and archaeologists have also discovered a stone inscription in the *shishi* that commemorates this journey—including a nearly verbatim record of the invocation. I conclude with a close reading of this pair of inscriptions, which constitute yet another narrative of Tuoba origins and ancestors, and discuss the implications for *Wei shu* historiography more broadly.

¹⁶ The “Shi Lao zhi” is named for the Buddha Śākyamuni (Shijiamouni 釋迦牟尼) and Laozi 老子.

Note on Translations

No complete translation of the *Wei shu* exists. A portion of the “Imperial Annals” has been translated into English by Jennifer Holmgren, covering almost all of *Wei shu* 1 and a brief section of *Wei shu* 2. The Buddhism section of the *Wei shu* “Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism” has been translated into modern Japanese by Tsukamoto Zenryū, and his work formed the base text of a translation into English by Leon Hurvitz. A previous translation by James Ware also exists, though it is unfortunately marred by several inaccuracies. The *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* volumes that cover the early Xianbei have not been translated.

I have made every effort to produce literal yet understandable translations, and to preserve consistency in my interpretations throughout the different passages of the texts I treat. Except in a few cases that I indicate, all translations are my own.

Part I

Chapter 1

Origins and Cultural Authority: Ethnography and Historiography on the Early Xianbei

Introduction

The emergence of Xianbei 鮮卑 as a demographic category, or ethnonym, occurs in historical records dating from the third century C.E., in the aftermath of the fall of the Han dynasty. Such historical narratives cover the history of the Xianbei from the time around the founding of the Former Han, and continue to trace them through the Later Han and after. Though it would perhaps be an overstatement to imply that the Xianbei in this early period actually constituted a distinct *ethnos*, their representation in historical sources does seem to conceptualize the Xianbei as comprising a cohesive population, with shared cultural norms and practices, and a defined territory. I hope through close readings of the earliest known historiographies that treat the Xianbei to illuminate the construction of Xianbei identity, with a focus on the issue of cultural difference, or otherness.

The structure of these earliest sources on Xianbei culture encompasses three elements: ethnography, history, and commentary by the historian. It is the ethnography section that is most revealing in terms of the representation of Xianbei culture: here we find a depiction of primitive (non-literate) nomadic herdsman who practice matrilineal succession and whose society is broadly matriarchic. They are portrayed as a fur-wearing tribe who hold the dog sacred and whose familial hierarchy is bizarrely upside-down. They are mostly ignorant of agriculture but do seem to plant and harvest during specific seasons, on the basis of their observations of the behavior of fauna, as they lack all

knowledge of the calendar. As I will argue, these earliest ethnographies of the Xianbei present a discourse on the northern other that strongly resonates with earlier ethnographic records on the Xiongnu. Of particular significance is the process of distancing, and the resultant construction of cultural difference. As I will clarify, these historiographical sources were written from the perspective of a normative, Han-Chinese cultural order.

The first part of this chapter explores these two early ethnographies of the Xianbei and Wuhuan as articulations of cultural difference between the ideals of Huaxia 華夏 civilization and the northern other. Construed as the representation of an *yi* 夷, these ethnographies draw on earlier archetypal depictions of the Xiongnu in order to demarcate a clear genealogical border between the Huaxia and nomadic outsiders. The second part of the chapter examines the earliest history of the Xianbei and Wuhuan, with a focus on relations with the Han and Xiongnu. Finally, in the third part of the chapter, I provide a close reading of the historians' commentary section from each text, the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu*. Both commentaries attribute a certain historical inevitability to the rise of cultural others beyond the northern border of the Huaxia realm.

The Historiographical Sources: *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu*

The earliest historical accounts of the Xianbei appear in two sources: the “Wuwan Xianbei Dongyi zhuan” 烏丸鮮卑東夷傳 (“Biography of Wuwan, Xianbei, and Eastern Yi”) in the *Wei shu* 魏書 (or *Wei zhi* 魏志) section, *juan* 30 of the *San guo zhi* 三國志; and the “Wuhuan Xianbei liezhuan” (烏桓鮮卑列傳) (“Arrayed Biography of Wuhuan and Xianbei”) *juan* 90 of the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書. As is evident from the titles of the biographies in which such ethnographies were placed, records on the Xianbei were

closely associated with those of another culture, the Wuhuan (or Wuwan), in what is clearly a geographical but, more importantly, is also a genealogical categorization. In both sources, the Wuhuan ethnographies that open each biography are much more expansive than those of the Xianbei, while for the Xianbei ethnographies, the historians simply noted: “their language and customs are identical to those of the Wuhuan” ([鮮卑] 其言語習俗與烏桓同),¹ adding only a few additional details specifically pertaining to Xianbei culture. The rationale for this difference in the treatment of Wuhuan and Xianbei in the histories—as attested by the historians themselves—is that the Han had earlier and more involved contact with the Wuhuan than with the Xianbei. As the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* accounts assert the identical nature of Xianbei and Wuhuan cultures, as observed above, I interpret the ethnography of the Wuhuan as also broadly applying to the Xianbei.

In order to interpret these two texts accurately, and to explain the striking similarities between them, it is necessary to first examine the textual histories of both the *San guo zhi* (三國志) and the *Hou Han shu*. The original text of the *San guo zhi*, compiled by Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–297 C.E.) between 285 C.E. and 297 C.E., was an assemblage of the existing histories of the states of Wei 魏 and Wu 吳, to which Chen Shou added his own history of Shu 蜀. Though the work was not commissioned by the Western Jin, which would supplant the Three Kingdoms state of Wei, it did receive

¹ *Hou Han shu* 90.2985. This phrase verbatim (except with Wuwan 烏丸, rather than Wuhuan 烏桓) appears in *Wei shu* 魏書, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.835. (n.b.: Throughout this chapter the *Wei shu* I refer to is that compiled by Wang Shen, c. 255 C.E., and not the sixth-century text of the same name.)

official recognition after it was submitted to the court.² Over a century later, in the early fifth century, Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372–451 C.E.) was commissioned by the emperor of the Liu Song dynasty to compose a commentary on the *San guo zhi*. The completed edition (presented in 429 C.E., and known as *San guo zhi zhu*) expanded the *San guo zhi* text to nearly twice its original volume, and incorporated more than two hundred other works that had been composed since the end of the second century C.E.³ As such, the *San guo zhi zhu* is a repository of often extensive excerpts from third-century texts, many of which have not survived elsewhere, and Pei’s work has therefore been considered as a “historiography of the history of the Three Kingdoms.”⁴

One source that Pei draws on heavily (including over one hundred citations) is the *Wei shu* (魏書) compiled by Wang Shen 王沈 et al. around 255 C.E.⁵ It is this excerpted *Wei shu* text that provides the ethnographic background on the Wuhuan and Xianbei in the *San guo zhi zhu*. Intriguingly, the quoted *Wei shu* section is very similar to the *Hou Han shu*’s ethnographic account of the Wuhuan and Xianbei, indicating that either the *Hou Han shu* drew on the same earlier *Wei shu* text, or that both the *Wei shu* and the *Hou*

² For a history and analysis of the *San guo zhi* text, see Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 83–87.

³ de Crespigny, “The Records of the Three Kingdoms: A Study in the Historiography of the *San-Kuo chih*,” 16–17.

⁴ Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 106.

⁵ de Crespigny, “The Records of the Three Kingdoms: A Study in the Historiography of the *San-Kuo chih*,” 82. de Crespigny cites *Sui shu* 48 that this *Wei shu* originally contained 48 *juan*; none have survived intact.

Han shu were based on another common source text, possibly one composed as early as during the Han.⁶

Scholars concur that the early fifth-century *Hou Han shu*, privately compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445 C.E.) in 90 *juan* during the Liu Song, was primarily based on the *Dong guan Han ji* 東觀漢記, an earlier official history of the Later Han that is now largely lost.⁷ Fan Ye himself composed the Prefaces (*xu* 序); Disquisitions (*lun* 論); and Eulogies (*zan* 贊) that are appended to the Annals (*ji* 紀) and Biography (*zhuan* 傳) sections of the *Hou Han shu*.⁸

This chapter, therefore, analyzes material from four discrete texts, as distinguished in detail above. To summarize, in order of chronology, these texts are: the *Wei shu* of Wang Shen (c. 255 C.E.), as preserved in *San guo zhi zhu*; the *San guo zhi* of Chen Shou (285–297 C.E.); the *Hou Han shu* of Fan Ye (early fifth century C.E.); and *San guo zhi zhu* of Pei Songzhi (429 C.E.).⁹ The chronological relationship between *Hou Han shu* and *San guo zhi zhu* is unclear, and it is possible that these two texts are roughly contemporaneous.

⁶ For an analysis of the two texts and discussion of the possible relationships between them, see Gardiner and de Crespigny, “T’an-Shih-Huai and the Hsien-pi Tribes of the Second Century A.D.”

⁷ Bielenstein, *Restoration of the Han Dynasty*, 12–17. See also Bielenstein and Loewe, “Dong guan Han ji” in Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 471–472; and Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 94–98.

⁸ Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 96.

⁹ Throughout this chapter, I refer to the *Wei shu* excerpt according to its citation in the standard edition of the *San guo zhi*, although technically, the *Wei shu* is preserved in the commentary, or *San guo zhi zhu*.

Ethnographies of the Wuhuan and Xianbei

The accounts in *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* both identify the Wuhuan and the Xianbei as formerly comprising branches of the Eastern *Hu* (東胡), and both narratives open with the conquests by the rising Xiongnu steppe empire in the late third century B.C.E. According to the accounts, the Wuhuan and the Xianbei were defeated and consequently displaced from their original territory (the location of which is not specifically mentioned). The Wuhuan sought refuge at a Wuhuan mountain, from which they derived their name, and the Xianbei fled for protection to a Xianbei mountain, the source of their name.¹⁰ According to the accounts, then, the Wuhuan and Xianbei only acquired such purely geographical ethnonyms after settling in their respective new locales. Culturally, the accounts ascribe the same lineage to both Wuhuan and Xianbei, as descendants of the older Eastern *Hu*. At this time, the Xianbei lineage had not yet diverged into different clan-based divisions (one of whom would be Tuoba).

The Wuhuan–Xianbei ethnographies in *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* establish a clear cultural affiliation with the archetypal northern other, the Xiongnu. The Wuhuan and Xianbei are depicted as pastoral nomads in strikingly similar language to that found in earlier descriptions of the Xiongnu:

俗善騎射，弋獵禽獸為事。隨水草放牧，居無常處。以穹廬為舍，東開向日。食肉飲酪，以毛毳為衣。¹¹

¹⁰ For the Wuhuan (or Wuwan), see *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.835 and *Hou Han shu* 90.2979: 烏桓者，本東胡也。漢初，匈奴冒頓滅其國，餘類保烏桓山，因以為號焉。 For the Xianbei, the text of *Wei shu* cited in *San guo zhi* 30.835: 鮮卑亦東胡之餘也，別保鮮卑山，因號焉 is slightly different from *Hou Han shu* 90.2985: 鮮卑者，亦東胡之支也，別依鮮卑山，故因號焉。

¹¹ *Hou Han shu* 90.2979; corresponding passage in *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.832.

They excel at mounted archery, and hunting birds and beasts with arrows is their [main] occupation. They follow the rivers and grasslands to pasture their herds, and they do not have a permanent dwelling. They shelter in yurts, which open to the east, facing the sun. They eat meat and drink kumiss, and use wool for clothing.

Earlier accounts of the Xiongnu, found in the *Shi ji* “Xiongnu liezhuan” and *Han shu* “Xiongnu zhuan” contain very similar descriptions:

隨草畜牧而轉移。其畜之所多則馬、牛、羊，其奇畜則橐佗、驢、羸、馱駝、駒駘、驪奚。逐水草遷徙，無城郭常居。¹²

[The Xiongnu] migrate around following the grasslands, and among their herds the most typical are horses, cows, and sheep, and their more rare animals are camels, asses, mules, and the wild horses *taotu* and *tuoji*. They move about in search of water and pasture, and have no walled cities or fixed dwellings.¹³

The accounts of the Xiongnu further report, “it is their custom that in peacetime they pasture their herds and make their living by hunting” (其俗，寬則隨畜，因射獵禽獸為生業).¹⁴ Reading these accounts together, that of the earlier Xiongnu and those of the later Wuhuan and Xianbei, one immediately notices the resonances, and might even surmise that these are descriptions of the same culture. The Wuhuan and Xianbei are thus strongly determined through these accounts to be nomadic, in the same vein as the earlier powerful nomads, the Xiongnu.

¹² *Han shu* 94a.3743. See also *Shi ji* 110.2879: 隨畜牧而轉移。其畜之所多則馬、牛、羊，其奇畜則橐駝、驢、羸、馱駝、駒駘、驪奚。逐水草遷徙，毋城郭常處。

¹³ Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian*, 129 (translation modified).

¹⁴ Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian*, 129 (translation modified). *Shi ji* 110.2879; See also *Han shu* 94a.3743: 其俗，寬則隨畜田獵禽獸為生業。

Moreover, just as the earlier accounts of the Xiongnu had provided an inventory of their animals, so too do the ethnographies that treat the Xianbei offer a description of their fauna:

又禽獸異於中國者，野馬、原羊、角端牛，以角為弓，俗謂之角端弓者。又有貂、豹、鼯子，皮毛柔輭，故天下以為名裘。¹⁵

The animals [of the Xianbei] are different from those of the central states, and include wild horses, plains sheep, and horn-tip cows, the horns of which are used to make bows, customarily called “horn bows.” They also have sable, *na*, and *hunzi*-rodents, whose pelts are soft and supple. These are known throughout the world as famous furs.

The passage draws a clear affiliation with accounts of the Xiongnu, a figure emblematic in the wearing of furs and felts: “From the chiefs of the tribe on down, everyone eats the meat of the domestic animals and wears clothes of hide or wraps made of felt or fur” (自君王以下，咸食畜肉，衣其皮革，被旃裘。)¹⁶ The Wuhuan (and Xianbei) ethnographies further include a description of native craft: “the women are able to pierce leather to make embroidery and weave felted wool. The men are able to make bows, arrows, and bridles, and to smelt metal into weaponry” (婦人能刺韋作文繡，織氈毼。男子能作弓矢鞍勒，鍛金鐵為兵器。)¹⁷

Beyond a simple listing of animals that may be found in Xianbei territory, however, the passage cited above also serves to delimit an ecological boundary, beyond which not only the human culture but also the animals differ. As Wang Mingke has

¹⁵ *Hou Han shu* 90.2985.

¹⁶ Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian*, 129 (translation modified). *Shi ji* 110.2879; *Han shu* 94a.3743.

¹⁷ *Hou Han shu* 90.2979–2980.

persuasively argued, early ethnographies of cultural others, such as these on the Xianbei and Wuhuan, constitute variations on the theme *fei wo zulei* (非我族類), in which the overriding concern of the historiographers is demarcating the ethno-cultural boundary of the Huaxia.¹⁸

In terms of the location of the Xianbei territory, the *Wei shu* ethnography locates it rather vaguely as reaching the Liao River in the east, and in the west stretching to the western regions (西域).¹⁹ The location of the Wuhuan territory is described with somewhat more specificity, in relation to other cultures in the region: “it lies to the southwest of the Dingling (丁令) [people], and to the northeast of the Wusun (烏孫) [people], and has many venomous snakes.”²⁰ The *Wei shu* account provides some additional details in its description: “[the Wuhuan] territory has no mountains, but has deserts, rivers, grasses and trees, and many venomous snakes.”²¹

In contrast to the Xiongnu, who knew no agriculture, according to the earlier accounts, the ethnographic records in the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* cover the limited agricultural products of the Wuhuan and Xianbei: “their land is suitable for millet and eastern *qiang*, which resembles fleabane (*pengcao*), its seeds like millet, ripening in the tenth lunar month. They observe the gestation and birthing among the birds and beasts in order to differentiate the four seasons” (其土地宜稌及東牆。東牆似蓬草，實如稌

¹⁸ See discussion in Wang Mingke, *Huaxia Bianyuan*, 84–85.

¹⁹ *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.835: 其地東接遼水，西當西（城）「域」。

²⁰ *Hou Han shu* 90.2984: 其土多蝮蛇，在丁令西南，烏孫東北焉。

²¹ *Wei shu*, cit. in *San guo zhi* 30.832: 地無山，有沙漠、流水、草木，多蝮蛇，在丁令之西南，烏孫之東北，以窮困之。

子，至十月而熟。見鳥獸孕乳，以別四節。).²² Interestingly, though the Wuhuan–Xianbei are reported here as growing agricultural products, they lack a calendar, relying on natural signs to inform them of the seasons. A slightly more lengthy description is found in the *Wei shu* excerpt:

俗識鳥獸孕乳，時以四節，耕種常用布穀鳴為候。地宜青稜、東牆，東牆似蓬草，實如葵子，至十月熟。能作白酒，而不知作麴。米常仰中國。²³

Their custom is to know the gestation and birthing among birds and beasts, and thereby calculate time according to the four seasons, and when planting they always use the *bugu* bird (literally, the “grain-disseminating bird”) for timing. They are able to make distilled liquor but don’t know how to make fermented. They depend on the central states for rice.

Indeed, the similarities seem to extend to all cultural aspects. The Wuhuan and Xianbei familial hierarchy is described as “to esteem the young and debase the old” (貴少而賤老),²⁴ a distillation of the extended description of the Xiongnu, in which “the strong eat the richest and finest [foods], while the old eat and drink what is left over, as [they] esteem the strong and healthy, and debase the old and weak” (壯者食肥美，老者飲食其餘。貴壯健，賤老弱。).²⁵

The Wuhuan–Xianbei and the Xiongnu share a significant kinship practice as well, that of marrying one’s stepmother or sister-in-law in the event of the death of one’s

²² *Hou Han shu* 90.2980.

²³ *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.832.

²⁴ *Shi ji* 110.2879.

²⁵ Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian*, 129–130 (translation modified). *Shi ji* 110.2879; *Han shu* 94a.3743.

father or brother. The description of this practice in the accounts of Wuhuan (and presumably Xianbei) is as follows: “in their custom, if their father or elder brother dies, they marry their stepmother or sister-in-law. If they do not have a sister-in-law, then their own sons become familial to their second wife’s uncles, and if she dies then they return to their original home” (父兄死，妻後母執嫂；若無執嫂者，則己子以親之次妻伯叔焉，死則歸其故夫).²⁶ The *Shi ji* and *Han shu* accounts of Xiongnu state simply: “if their father dies, they marry their stepmother; if their elder or younger brothers die, they all take their wives to marry” (父死，妻其後母；兄弟死，皆取其妻妻之).²⁷

The ethnographies of Wuhuan–Xianbei and Xiongnu also correlate in descriptions of their communication and naming conventions. In an explanation of tribal structure, the Wuhuan–Xianbei ethnographies contain the following:

有勇健能理決鬪訟者，推為大人，無世業相繼。邑落各有小帥，數百千落自為一部。大人有所招呼，則刻木為信，雖無文字，而部眾不敢違犯。氏姓無常，以大人健者名字為姓。大人以下，各自畜牧營產，不相徭役。²⁸

Those who are brave, strong, and capable of arbitrating grievances are promoted as chieftains, and there is no [tradition of] succession in rulership. Within each encampment is a lower-level leader, and several hundred thousand encampments form one tribe. When the chieftain has an order, it is carved on wood as a letter, and although they lack writing, the tribesmen do not dare defy it. They do not have constant clan names and surnames, and instead take the name of their chieftain strongman as their surname. From the chieftain down, each cares for his own herds and goods, and they do not provide corvée labor.

²⁶ I have followed the expanded (and therefore more understandable) *Wei shu* account cited in *San guo zhi* 30.832, rather than the corresponding, highly compact language in *Hou Han shu* 90.2979.

²⁷ *Shi ji* 110.2879; *Han shu* 94a.3743.

²⁸ *Hou Han shu* 90.2979.

In a standard trope of cultural otherness, the Wuhuan–Xianbei are represented as a primitive, non-writing culture, just as the Xiongnu had been in earlier histories. The *Shi ji* and *Han shu* record: “[the Xiongnu] lack writing, and use spoken language to make agreements” (無文書，以言語為約束).²⁹ The recorded naming system is also analogous, according to which the Xiongnu have personal names but no taboos on such names, and they do not have surnames or *zi* (style-names) (其俗有名不諱，而無姓字).³⁰ In these accounts of Wuhuan–Xianbei society, as in the earlier accounts of the Xiongnu, the clear implication is the divergence from the Huaxia civilization, in which writing, naming, and principles of rulership represent codifications of the normative civilized order.

The ethnography section of the accounts records the customary punishments and a rudimentary legal code of the Wuhuan and Xianbei:

其約法，違大人言死，盜不止死。其相殘殺，令都落自相報，相報不止，詣大人平之，有罪者出其牛羊以贖死命，乃止。自殺其父兄無罪。其亡叛為大人所捕者，諸邑落不肯受，皆逐使至雍狂地。³¹

On their norms and laws: if someone disobeys the words of a chieftain, [the penalty is death]. For stealing, [the penalty is] not death. In cases of massacres [between encampments], the camps are ordered to compensate each other. If compensation is not attainable, it is reported to the chieftain to pacify. If the guilty gives up their herds of cows and sheep as recompense for the deaths, it then is resolved. If one kills one’s own father or elder brother, it is not a crime. If one [attempts to] defect, he is captured by the chieftain, none within the tribe will

²⁹ *Shi ji* 110.2879; *Han shu* 94a.3743.

³⁰ *Shi ji* 110.2879. Watson notes that in *Shi ji*, the character *xing* is “probably an error,” without further explanation. See Watson, *Records*, 130n1. Cf. *Han shu* 94a.3743: “they have personal names without taboos, and do not have *zi* (style-names)” (其俗有名不諱而無字).

³¹ *Wei shu*, cit. in *San guo zhi* 30.832.

accept him, and everyone chases him into a remote area in the middle of the desert.³²

However, not all ethnographic details pertaining to the Wuhuan and Xianbei in the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* find historiographical precedents in earlier records on the Xiongnu, as the following description of Wuhuan and Xianbei familial relations illustrates:

其性悍塞。怒則殺父兄，而終不害其母，以母有族類，父兄無相仇報故也。³³

Their nature is fierce and obstinate. If angered, [they will] kill their father or elder brothers, but will never harm their mothers. It is their mother who possesses the ancestral lineage (*zulei*), so there is no reason for their father or elder brothers to avenge enmity on behalf of each other.

An attribution of matrilineality is not found in accounts of the Xiongnu; the important point is that it is nevertheless a departure from Huaxia cultural norms.

Furthermore, the ethnographies assert that Wuhuan–Xianbei society is matriarchal, stating that women are the decision-makers of the tribe, and only military

³² This translation for the most part follows the *Wei shu* version, with slight additions from the *Hou Han shu* version. The complete version found in *Hou Han shu* 90.2980 is as follows: 其約法：違大人言者，罪至死；若相賊殺者，令部落自相報，不止，詣大人告之，聽出馬牛羊以贖死；其自殺父兄則無罪；若亡畔為大人所捕者，邑落不得受之，皆徙逐於雍狂之地，沙漠之中。

³³ *Hou Han shu* 90.2979. The term *zulei* is polysemantic, as Tamara Chin has persuasively argued, ranging from “branch-lineage” or “ancestral lineage” to “kind,” and may at times be understood as akin to ethnicity. See Chin, “Antiquarian as Ethnographer,” 130–135. In this context, I interpret it as narrowly pertaining to lineage. The language is slightly different in *Wei shu* cited in *San guo zhi* 30.832, which I translate as: “Their nature is fierce and obstinate; if angered, they will kill their father or elder brothers, but will never harm their mother. Their *zulei* is through their mother, and their father and elder brothers take themselves as *zhong*, so there is no reason for avenging”: 其性悍驚，怒則殺父兄，而終不害其母，以母有族類，父兄以己為種，無復報者故也。

affairs are the domain of the men (故其俗從婦人計，至戰鬪時，乃自決之。³⁴)

Marriage practices involve the husband entering the wife's home and family during a courtship period of one to two years, betrothing animals such as cows, horses, and sheep, and acting as a servant to her family members, paying obeisance to her family rather than to his own parents:

其嫁娶則先略女通情，或半歲百日，然後送牛馬羊畜，以為娉幣。壻隨妻還家，妻家無尊卑，旦旦拜之，而不拜其父母。為妻家僕役，一二年間，妻家乃厚遣送女，居處財物一皆為辦。³⁵

When they take a wife, they first assess mutual affection with the woman, and some wait half a year or one hundred days, then send cows, horses, goats, livestock as betrothal gifts. The husband returns with his wife to her family, and each morning he must pay obeisance to them without respect to a hierarchy within the family, but does not pay obeisance to his own parents. He acts as a servant to his wife's family for one or two years, and then his wife's family then generously gives their daughter, and the wealth of the dwelling is managed together.

Another set of material within the ethnographic accounts of Wuhuan (and Xianbei) is somewhat ambiguous, and does not categorically represent “otherness,” as defined against the Huaxia cultural order. One such passage details worship and burial practices, and draws parallels to beliefs found among people of the central states:

貴兵死，斂屍有棺，始死則哭，葬則歌舞相送。肥養犬，以采繩嬰牽，并取亡者所乘馬、衣物、生時服飾，皆燒以送之。特屬累犬，使護死者神靈歸乎赤山。赤山在遼東西北數千里，如中國人以死之魂神歸泰山也。至葬日，夜聚親舊員坐，牽犬馬歷位，或歌哭者，擲肉與之。使二人口頌呪文，使死者魂神徑至，歷險阻，勿令橫鬼遮護，達其赤山，然後殺犬馬衣物燒之。

³⁴ *Wei shu* cited in *San guo zhi* 30.833; See also *Hou Han shu* 90.2979: 計謀從用婦人，唯鬪戰之事乃自決之。

³⁵ *Hou Han shu* 90.2979.

敬鬼神，祠天地日月星辰山川，及先大人有健名者，亦同祠以牛羊，祠畢皆燒之。飲食必先祭。³⁶

According to their custom, when a high-ranking fighting man dies, as they prepare the body for the coffin, there are tearful lamentations, and when they near the tomb they then sing and dance to send off [the body]. They fatten a dog, and harness it with colorful tassels, and along with the deceased's riding clothes, they burn it all and send it off. They use a special succession of dogs in order to protect the soul of the deceased as it returns to Chi Mountain. Chi Mountain is several thousand *li* northwest of Liaodong, and [this practice] is similar to that of the souls of the people in the central states returning to Mount Tai. When the day of the burial arrives, relatives gather to sit through the night, and harness the dogs into position with horses, some singing and lamenting, and others giving them meat. Two people speak incantations, to summon the soul of the deceased to come, as it passes through obstacles, and when the soul reaches Chi Mountain, they then kill the dogs and riding clothing and burn it all.

[They] revere ghosts and spirits, and worship heaven, earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, mountains, and rivers, as well as the strong and well known among their former chieftains. In their worship they use cows and sheep as sacrifices, in the end burning them. Whenever they eat or drink they must first worship.³⁷

While the report of a dog cult among Wuhuan and Xianbei would of course be construed as highly unusual, the idea of souls returning after death to a sacred mountain is intriguingly analogous to practices in the central states, as noted in the passage itself.

Finally, the ethnography in the *San guo zhi* also contains a passage on medical knowledge among the Wuhuan (and Xianbei): “if they have an illness, they know how to do moxibustion; sometimes they apply a heated stone or lay on the heated earth; sometimes they use a knife to cut through the blood vessels for bloodletting, by tracing the source of the pain, and supplicating to the gods of heaven, earth, mountains and

³⁶ *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.831–832.

³⁷ See also the corresponding passage in *Hou Han shu* 90.2980: 俗貴兵死，斂屍以棺，有哭泣之哀，至葬則歌舞相送。肥養一犬，以彩繩纓牽，并取死者所乘馬衣物，皆燒而送之，言以屬累犬，使護死者神靈歸赤山。赤山在遼東西北數千里，如中國人死者魂神歸岱山也。敬鬼神，祠天地日月星辰山川及先大人有健名者。祠用牛羊，畢皆燒之。

rivers, and they do not have acupuncture” (有病，知以艾灸，或燒石自熨，燒地臥上，或隨痛病處，以刀決脈出血，及祝天地山川之神，無鍼藥。)³⁸ In this instance, too, the ethnography compares and contrasts between the cultural practices of the Wuhuan–Xianbei and those of the central states.

Early History of Wuhuan and Xianbei

The early history of the Wuhuan and Xianbei is chronicled in the same two historiographical sources that I discussed at length above, the *San guo zhi* (with commentary) and the *Hou Han shu*. The coverage of the Wuhuan and Xianbei historical narratives is somewhat different in each source, as might be expected: the original *San guo zhi* text records the period from the end of the Later Han through the Three Kingdoms state of Wei, justifying its decision not to include earlier historical events with the rationale that “the customs and past affairs [of the Wuhuan and Xianbei] have already been recorded in the historical records of the Han.”³⁹ It covers Wuhuan history through the assassination of the leader Ta Dun in 207 C.E., and Xianbei history little beyond the assassination of the leader Kebineng in 235 C.E. The later commentary by Pei Songzhi then excerpts the *Wei shu* (authored by Wang Shen) to fill in the early history of the Wuhuan and Xianbei, opening with the defeat of the Wuhuan and Xianbei by Xiongnu in 206 B.C.E. The *Hou Han shu* account has the same starting point (206 B.C.E.), and covers the Wuhuan through the assassination of the leader Ta Dun in 207 C.E.; for the Xianbei, it covers the period ending with the death of Tanshihuai (c. 178–184 C.E.). As

³⁸ *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.831.

³⁹ *San guo zhi* 30.831: 其習俗、前事，撰漢記者已錄而載之矣。

noted in my earlier discussion of these texts, the *Hou Han shu* account and the excerpted *Wei shu* account found in the commentary edition of *San guo zhi* are very similar, and nearly identical in places, indicating that either the *Hou Han shu* is based on the *Wei shu* or both texts drew on another original source. In other words, we are dealing with three texts: the original *San guo zhi*; the *San guo zhi* commentary, including excerpts from the *Wei shu*; and the *Hou Han shu*.

The historical accounts of the Wuhuan and Xianbei open with the defeat of the Eastern *Hu* (東胡) by the rising Xiongnu steppe empire, led by the *shanyu* Modun, in the late third century B.C.E. (206 B.C.E.). The two branches of the former Eastern *Hu*, the Wuhuan and the Xianbei, were reportedly then driven northward into the Xing'an (Khingan) mountain range in present-day northeastern Inner Mongolia or northern Manchuria.⁴⁰ The *Hou Han shu* and *Wei shu* excerpt in *San guo zhi* recount that the Wuhuan took refuge at a Wuhuan mountain, from which they took their name; similarly, the Xianbei fled for protection to a Xianbei mountain, from which they derived their name. According to the sources, though the Xianbei were in close contact with the Wuhuan, they seldom were in communication with *Zhongguo*, the central states: "Since the Xianbei were defeated by Modun, they fled far-off to Liaodong outside the borders, and did not strive against other states, so had not yet been in contact with the Han, but

⁴⁰ Holcombe, "The Xianbei in Chinese History," 3–4. Holcombe suggests that the Wuhuan and the Xianbei likely occupied an area near the Liao River in southern Manchuria prior to their defeat by the Xiongnu.

were in close association with the Wuhuan” (鮮卑自為冒頓所破，遠竄遼東塞外，不與餘國爭衡，未有名通於漢，而由自與烏丸相接。).⁴¹

The Wuhuan (or Wuwan)

The Wuhuan, “isolated and weakened” as a consequence of their earlier defeat by the Xiongnu, largely became subordinate to the Xiongnu, paying annual tribute to them in the form of fur pelts and wives. The Han, within the context of military offensives against the Xiongnu under Han Wudi (r. 141–87 B.C.E.), implemented a policy to resettle the Wuhuan along the border areas “outside the passes” (*saiwai* 塞外),⁴² in order for them to conduct reconnaissance missions against the Xiongnu on behalf of the Han. A Han official was also appointed to supervise the Wuhuan (with the title “hu Wuhuan xiaowei” 護烏桓校尉), and Wuhuan chieftains commenced annual appearances at the Han court.⁴³ In 78 B.C.E., the Wuhuan mounted an attack against the Xiongnu, in which they pillaged the tombs of the Xiongnu *shanyus*, an act that brought swift retaliation in the form of a Xiongnu punitive raid and decisive defeat.⁴⁴ The Han scheme to recruit the

⁴¹ *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.835. See also *Hou Han shu* 90.2985: “Since the beginning of the Han, [the Xianbei] also were defeated by Mao Dun, and fled far-off to Liaodong outside the borders, and though they were in close association with the Wuhuan, they were not yet in contact with Zhongguo” (漢初，亦為冒頓所破，遠竄遼東塞外，與烏桓相接，未常通中國焉。).

⁴² Specifically, the Wuhuan were settled in the areas beyond the borders of the following five Han commanderies: Shanggu (上谷); Yuyang (漁陽); You Beiping (右北平); Liaoxi (遼西); and Liaodong (遼東). See *Hou Han shu* 90.2981.

⁴³ *Hou Han shu* 90.2981. See also Holcombe, “The Xianbei in Chinese History,” 5–6; and Pan, “Early Chinese Settlement Policies toward the Nomads,” 44.

⁴⁴ *Hou Han shu* 90.2981; *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.833. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 59.

Wuhuan and bring them into the fold did not, however, preclude them from carrying out border raids against the Han in the first century B.C.E., and in the early first century C.E., the Wuhuan and Xiongnu allied to attack the Han border, at Dai commandery.⁴⁵

The *Hou Han shu* records that in 47 C.E., the Wuhuan took advantage of Xiongnu internal weakness to force them northward from their territory in the southern Gobi. For this successful effort, the Wuhuan were rewarded by the Han court, and in 49 C.E., a massive delegation of nearly one thousand Wuhuan tribesmen presented tribute to the Han court in the form of slaves, cattle, horses, arrows, and fur pelts. In addition to being richly rewarded by the Han emperor, eighty-one Wuhuan chieftains were also invested with Chinese administrative titles, and allowed to settle within the passes (*sainei* 塞內), arrayed along the border areas of the Han commanderies, and expected to provide reconnaissance and military defense against the Xiongnu and Xianbei.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, past experience had shown that the allegiance of the Wuhuan was inconstant, and Ban Biao 班彪, for one, memorialized to the Han court that “as the nature of the Wuhuan is nimble and shrewd, and they love to raid and plunder” (烏桓天性輕黠，好為寇賊), it would be appropriate to reinstate the position of Wuhuan supervisor (the “Wuhuan xiaowei” 烏桓校尉) as an effort to protect against potential Wuhuan raids, and the Han emperor agreed.⁴⁷ The Wuhuan overseer was established in Shanggu 上谷 commandery, and the Han also opened a *yingfu* (營府) which coordinated hostage diplomacy and

⁴⁵ *Hou Han shu* 90.2981; also *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.833.

⁴⁶ *Hou Han shu* 90.2982; See also Holcombe, “The Xianbei in Chinese History,” 6. *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.833 specifies that the invested Wuhuan were placed in Liaodong, Liaoxi, You Beiping, Yuyang, Guangyang, Shanggu, Dai, Yanmen, Taiyuan, and Shuofang.

⁴⁷ *Hou Han shu* 90.2982.

rewards for military actions (especially those against the northern Xiongnu), and also conducted frontier trade.⁴⁸

Han diplomacy with the Wuhuan must be understood in the broader context of Xiongnu political history at the time. By the middle of the first century B.C.E., the once-unified Xiongnu steppe empire had divided into northern and southern factions, following a succession conflict, each presided over by a separate *shanyu*. The southern Xiongnu migrated southward to an area within Han borders as the *shanyu* allied himself with the Han, and instigated Han-led military expeditions against the northern Xiongnu, often recruiting Wuhuan troops in the process.⁴⁹ Essentially the political situation at the time could be understood as a proxy conflict, wherein the southern Xiongnu would use Han troops (who often enlisted Wuhuan and sometimes Xianbei) to fight the northern Xiongnu. Barfield writes, “under the Later Han emperor Guangwu military aid initially consisted of payments to the Wuhuan and Xianbei for attacks on the northern Xiongnu. Under Emperors Ming (r. 58–75) and Zhang (r. 76–88), the Chinese increased their support, supplying troops and financing invasions of northern Xiongnu territory.”⁵⁰ In 89 C.E., the northern Xiongnu were decisively defeated by a combined force of Han, southern Xiongnu, and Xianbei troops. The northern *shanyu* fled even farther northward, and by about 91 C.E., the former northern Xiongnu territory in present-day Mongolia was abandoned.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Hou Han shu* 90.2982.

⁴⁹ Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 75–77.

⁵⁰ Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 77.

⁵¹ Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 79–80; Holcombe, “The Xianbei in Chinese History,” 7.

Throughout the second century C.E., groups of Wuhuan alternated between carrying out border raids (often together with the Xianbei and/or southern Xiongnu), and offering submission and tribute to the Han, in exchange for titles and rewards. The *Hou Han shu* reports the strength of the various Wuhuan chieftains (each of whom declared himself *wang* 王) for the year 168 C.E. as follows: Shanggu tribe: over 9,000 camps (*luo* 落); Liaoxi tribe: over 5,000 camps; Liaodong: over 1,000 camps, You Beiping: over 800 camps. Early in the reign of the last Later Han emperor (Emperor Xianping, r. 189–220), a Wuhuan leader named Ta Dun 蹋頓 emerged in Liaoxi, who took command of Wuhuan tribes in three commanderies. Strategically aligning himself with Yuan Shao 袁紹 (the *mu* of Jizhou 冀州牧), Ta Dun was rewarded with *shanyu* seals and ribbons (illegitimately conferred, according to the *Hou Han shu*). Eventually, in 207 C.E., Cao Cao personally led a military expedition against the Wuhuan and decapitated Ta Dun in battle at White Wolf Mountain 白狼山, and subsequently Yuan Shao, who had fled eastward into Liaodong with other Wuhuan leaders, was captured and killed by the Liaodong *taishou* (太守). The defeat resulted in the southward relocation of Wuhuan in droves onto the central plain: “the surviving Wuhuan tribesmen, numbering more than ten thousand camps, all moved to settle in the central states” (其餘眾萬餘落，悉徙居中國云),⁵² and the Wuhuan who remained in the north were “gradually absorbed into the

⁵² *Hou Han shu* 90.2984. *San guo zhi* 30.834 records that the survivors all submitted [to Cao Cao], and that over ten thousand camps of Wuhuan in Youzhou and Bingzhou were relocated with their tribes to settle in the central states, while their chieftains and tribesmen were pressed into military expeditions. *San guo zhi* 30.834 states, “From this point, the Wuhuan of the Three Commanderies became well-known throughout *tianxia* as riders.” (其餘遺迸皆降。及幽州、并州柔所統烏丸萬餘落，悉徙其族居中國，帥從其侯王大人種眾與征伐。由是三郡烏丸為天下名騎。)

emerging Xianbei identity.”⁵³ As Holcombe further observes, from this point, “the Wuhuan identity was permanently disrupted.”⁵⁴ The assimilation of the Wuhuan in the early third century C.E. closes their biography in both the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* narratives.

The Xianbei

The historical narrative of the Xianbei opens with their defeat by the Xiongnu under Modun in the late third century B.C.E. (206 B.C.E.), and their seeking refuge beyond the pass in Liaodong (遼東塞外). The Xianbei history for the Former Han period is sparse; the next historical moment in the accounts involves raiding on the northern border, which was led by Xiongnu and participated in by both Xianbei and Wuhuan, in the early period of the Later Han (25 C.E.). At one point the Xiongnu-led Xianbei even invaded Liaodong (in 45 C.E.), but were defeated. In 49 C.E., the Xianbei opened diplomatic relations with the Han,⁵⁵ which initially entailed Xianbei mercenaries being commanded to attack the northern Xiongnu, for which they would be rewarded on the

⁵³ Holcombe, “The Xianbei in Chinese History,” 6–7.

⁵⁴ Holcombe, “The Xianbei in Chinese History,” 6–7.

⁵⁵ The *Hou Han shu* explains this strategy in light of the alliance between the southern Xiongnu and Han, which resulted in the northern Xiongnu becoming weak and isolated. See *Hou Han shu* 90.2985: 及南單于附漢，北虜孤弱，二十五年，鮮卑始通驛使。The *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.835 presents the Xianbei extension of diplomatic relations with the Han somewhat differently: “as the northern and southern *shanyus* attacked each other, the Xiongnu suffered losses, and the Xianbei consequently became powerful” (南北單于更相攻伐，匈奴損耗，而鮮卑遂盛。).

basis of the quantity of Xiongnu heads they successfully retrieved. This exchange was overseen by Han officials in Liaodong.⁵⁶

In 54 C.E., however, two Xianbei chieftains led their tribesmen to be formally received by the Han, presenting tribute, and expressing their wish to submit to the Han. The emperor invested the two chieftains with the titles *wang* 王 and *hou* 侯. By 57 C.E., all the Xianbei chieftains paid allegiance to the Han (including, the *Wei shu* of *San guo zhi* records, those as far west as in Dunhuang 燉煌 and Jiuquan 酒泉), and in return for their defense against Wuhuan raiding, were compensated monetarily by Qingzhou 青州 and Xuzhou 徐州 in particular.⁵⁷ As Holcombe details, during the Later Han, as the Wuhuan had migrated south toward the northern border commanderies of the Han, the Xianbei had “followed along behind, not only entering former Wuhuan territory but also spreading west as far as modern Gansu.”⁵⁸ This policy was reportedly effective for most of the second half of the first century, and the border was guarded without incident.

During the late first and early second centuries C.E. (89–105 C.E.), the Han attacks against the northern Xiongnu caused the northern *shanyu* to flee even farther north. The defeat of the northern Xiongnu and their abandonment of their steppe pastureland facilitated the migration of Xianbei onto the former Xiongnu territory. The *Hou Han shu* account emphasizes this as a critical point in Xianbei history, stating, “the surviving Xiongnu tribesmen numbered over a hundred thousand camps, and they all

⁵⁶ *Hou Han shu* 90.2985.

⁵⁷ *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.836; *Hou Han shu* 90.2986. Gardiner and de Crespigny believe this to be an anachronism, as this is the only reference to the Xianbei occupying territory to the far west in the first century C.E. See Gardiner and de Crespigny, “T’an-Shih-Huai and the Hsien-pi Tribes of the Second Century A.D.,” 12.

⁵⁸ Holcombe, “The Xianbei in Chinese History,” 7.

proclaimed themselves Xianbei. After this, the Xianbei gradually flourished” (匈奴餘種留者尚有十餘萬落，皆自號鮮卑，鮮卑由此漸盛。).⁵⁹ The northern Xiongnu were decisively defeated by 91 C.E., through a coordinated expedition of Han, southern Xiongnu, and Xianbei troops. The *shanyu* of the northern Xiongnu fled farther north; the former Xiongnu territory in present-day Mongolia was abandoned, and the Xianbei moved in to occupy the Xiongnu pastures.⁶⁰ Interestingly, the Xiongnu tribesmen essentially all defected to the Xianbei in the face of their defeat.

In the early second century C.E., in the aftermath of Xianbei attacks on the Han border (in the commanderies of You Beiping and Yuyang), the Han court extended rewards to the Xianbei that were both material and symbolic. The Xianbei chieftain was invested with imperial regalia, while the Han court set up “hostage offices” (*zhiguan* 質館), for the holding of hostages from each of the one hundred and twenty Xianbei tribes. Yet in spite of these protections, the Xianbei tactics were far from predictable: as the *Hou Han shu* notes, “Since that time, the Xianbei sometimes surrendered and sometimes rebelled, and they alternately battled with the Wuhuan and Xiongnu” (是後或降或畔，與匈奴、烏桓更相攻擊。)⁶¹ Indeed, Xianbei border raids occurred sporadically between 115 C.E. and 120 C.E., when Liaoxi Xianbei chieftains Wulun 烏倫 and

⁵⁹ *Hou Han shu* 90.2986.

⁶⁰ Barfield, *A Perilous Frontier*, 79.

⁶¹ *Hou Han shu* 90.2986.

Qizhijian 其至鞬 led their tribesmen to submit to the Han and present tribute, in exchange for their investiture as *wang* and *hou*, respectively, and gifts of silk.⁶²

Qizhijian

Throughout the following several years (between 121 C.E. and 132 C.E.), the Liaoxi Xianbei leader Qizhijian 其至鞬 successfully directed an extensive series of raids along the Han frontier—ranging from Liaoxi commandery in the east to Dai commandery in the west—as well as attacks on the southern Xiongnu. In the midst of these Xianbei offensives, the Han commanded a large force of border troops and Wuhuan recruits to attack the Xianbei outside the border, where they defeated the Xianbei and reportedly induced thirty thousand Xianbei tribesmen to beg for surrender in Liaodong.⁶³ (The *Wei shu* cited in *San guo zhi* further notes that following the movement of the Xiongnu with the northern *shanyu*, there were still more than ten thousand tribesmen remaining behind, and they also presented themselves in Liaodong at this time, proclaiming themselves to be Xianbei troops. If accurate, this would be the second instance of Xiongnu passing themselves off as Xianbei, but it is more likely that this information is misattributed to these years.)⁶⁴ Xianbei incursions into Han territory apparently temporarily ceased after the death of Qizhijian in 132 C.E.⁶⁵ Although Qizhijian seems not to have unified the

⁶² *Hou Han shu* 90.2987.

⁶³ *Hou Han shu* 90.2988; *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.836.

⁶⁴ *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi*, 30.836; Gardiner and de Crespigny remark that this phrase “clearly relates to events in the late first century C.E.” See Gardiner and de Crespigny, “T’an-Shih-Huai and the Hsien-pi Tribes of the Second Century A.D.,” 12–13.

⁶⁵ *Hou Han shu* 90.2988–2989.

various Xianbei groups into an enduring coalition, he is significant in light of the fact that he is the first named Xianbei leader in the sources to have coordinated such extensive frontier attacks.

Tanshihuai

The Xianbei chieftain who would successfully unify the various independent Xianbei tribal groups into a loose-knit confederation was Tanshihuai 檀石槐 (c. 136–181 C.E.). In contrast to Qizhijian, whose power was predominantly centered in the region of Liaoxi, Tanshihuai established his ruling base at Mount Danhan 彈汗山, which was reportedly located about three hundred *li* north of Gaoliu 高柳 in Dai commandery.⁶⁶ Promoted to chieftain at a young age after distinguishing himself through a display of bravery and martial prowess, he later attained the allegiance of all the eastern and western Xianbei chieftains. Tanshihuai is then recorded as having “raided the frontier to the south; resisting the Dingling 丁零 to the north; repelled the Fuyu 夫餘 in the east; and attacked the Wusun 烏孫 in the west, coming to occupy all of the former Xiongnu territory, spanning more than fourteen thousand *li* from east to west, and more than seven thousand *li* from north to south, [his territory] encompassing mountains, rivers, marshes, and saltponds.”⁶⁷

In a trope that will become increasingly familiar, the *Hou Han shu* and *Wei shu* accounts both contain a narrative of Tanshihuai’s miraculous birth. According to the

⁶⁶ Mount Danhan has been identified as modern Mount Daqing 大青, east of Hohhot in Inner Mongolia, and approximately a hundred miles north of modern Datong.

⁶⁷ *Hou Han shu* 90.2989: 因南抄緣邊，北拒丁零，東卻夫餘，西擊烏孫，盡據匈奴故地，東西萬四千餘里，南北七千餘里，網羅山川水澤鹽池。

narrative, Tanshihuai was born during a three-year period when his father was away following Xiongnu forces. Suspicious, Tanshihuai's father wanted the infant killed, but Tanshihuai's mother appealed that he be spared, as his birth was clearly miraculous. Tanshihuai's mother declared that he was born ten months after she became impregnated by swallowing a hailstone that had fallen into her mouth from the sky, just after she had heard the sound of thunder. Insisting that the child is thus extraordinary, she pleads that he be allowed to grow up.⁶⁸ Her husband, unbelieving, has the infant exposed, but Tanshihuai's mother secretly conspires to arrange for her relatives to raise him.⁶⁹ Even as a young man, he is recognized for his extraordinary strength, bravery, and strategic mind.

Between 156 and 166 C.E., Tanshihuai led incursions against the northern border of the Han, commencing with a raid on Yunzhong that involved between three and four thousand horsemen. The attacks culminated in 166 C.E., when Tanshihuai divided and arrayed his armed cavalry to invade the nine commanderies of the northern border, during which they killed officials and pillaged settlements. The Han court made a desperate attempt to stem the invasions with an offer of *heqin* (和親) diplomacy, sending an envoy to invest Tanshihuai as *wang*, with the appropriate imperial seals. Tanshihuai declined the offer, and the raiding subsequently intensified. At this point, according to the accounts in *Hou Han shu* and *Wei shu*, Tanshihuai formally organized a tripartite ruling structure,

⁶⁸ *Hou Han shu* 90.2989: 妻言嘗晝行聞雷震，仰天視而雹入其口，因吞之，遂身，十月而產，此子必有奇異，且宜長視。 See also *Wei shu*, cited in *San guo zhi* 30.837, which contains the more understandable phrase 遂妊身, to become pregnant, the character 妊 apparently having been dropped in *Hou Han shu*.

⁶⁹ For a literary analysis of the formal elements of this “hero story,” and its affinity to other northeast Asian stories, see Gardiner and de Crespigny, “T’an-Shih-Huai and the Hsien-pi Tribes of the Second Century A.D.,” 16–23. They advance the argument that the narrative of Tanshihuai constitutes a fragment of a Xianbei oral tradition, which was only later codified in written Chinese histories.

with himself presiding over all. He divided the Xianbei territory into three broad regions, each ruled by a chieftain supervisor: eastern (from You Beiping eastward to Liaodong); central (from You Beiping westward to Shanggu); and western (from Shanggu westward to Dunhuang). The unification of Xianbei groups seems to have resulted in annual and much more highly coordinated incursions along the entire perimeter of the northern Han frontier, as recorded from the year 168 C.E. onward: “there was not a year in which the border commanderies of the three provinces Youzhou, Bingzhou, and Liangzhou were not subjected to Xianbei raiding, plundering and massacring; [the Xianbei’s] numbers could not be overcome.”⁷⁰

The attacks continued into the next decade, and prompted the Han court to convene a strategy discussion for defending against the continual Xianbei incursions. In the course of the debate on whether to undertake a punitive expedition into Xianbei steppe territory, the scholar Cai Yong 蔡邕 vehemently argued against such a move on the grounds that the expedition would be a waste of resources against a foe more powerful and better equipped than the Xiongnu had been, with little to gain even if they were successful.⁷¹ Cai Yong’s objections were overruled, however, and the Han embarked on a massive offensive in 177 C.E., and the outcome was a disastrous defeat. As Rafe de Crespigny observes, “this was the first defeat of a major Chinese army since the time of Former Han, and overall consequences for control of the north were

⁷⁰ *Hou Han shu* 90.2990: 幽、并、涼三州緣邊諸郡無歲不被鮮卑寇抄，殺略不可勝數。； *San guo zhi* 30.836 records raiding in only Youzhou and Bingzhou, and states, “in the frontier commanderies, not one year went without poisoning by the Xianbei” (緣邊諸郡，無歲不被其毒).

⁷¹ The debate is preserved in *Hou Han shu* 90.2990–2993. Discussion of the court debate and Han campaign appear in de Crespigny, *Northern Frontier: The Policies and Strategy of the Later Han Empire*, 339–342.

serious.”⁷² Xianbei incursions at points spanning from Liaoxi province in the east to Jiuquan in the far west continued unabated under the leader Tanshihuai until his death around 181 C.E.

The *Hou Han shu* account recounts a curious anecdote about Tanshihuai not many years before his death that casts him in the role of food-provider for his tribes:

種眾日多，田畜射獵不足給食，檀石槐乃自徇行，見烏侯秦水廣從數百里，水停不流，其中有魚，不能得之。聞倭人善網捕，於是東擊倭人國，得千餘家，徙置秦水上，令捕魚以助糧食。⁷³

As the tribes increased daily, their agricultural products, domestic animals and hunted animals became insufficient for sustenance, so Tanshihuai personally set out on a inspection tour, and observed that the Wuhouqin river was many hundreds of *li* in breadth, and [in the places where] the river didn't flow, there were fish, but he couldn't get them. Tanshihuai had heard that the people of Wa were proficient in using nets for capturing [fish], so he attacked the country of Wa-people to the east, attaining over a thousand families, and resettled them at the banks of the Qin river, and ordered them to catch fish to supplement their food supplies.

The significance of this anecdote is to enhance Tanshihuai's personal authority as Xianbei ruler. As leader of the steppe nomadic tribesmen, his accomplishments as tactician and his ability to unify various tribes across a wide swath of territory is well established; the purpose of this story is to represent him as clever food provisioner for his growing population. As scholars have noted, it is highly unlikely that Tanshihuai actually

⁷² de Crespigny, “The Military Culture of Later Han,” in Di Cosmo, ed. *Military Culture in Imperial China*, 107–108.

⁷³ *Hou Han shu* 90.2994. Intriguingly, the *Wei shu* account preserved in *San guo zhi* differs, with the population in question identified as Hanren (汗人), their territory is named as the “country of Hanren” (汗人國), and the account even provides an evidentiary claim that “down to the present, there are many hundred households of Hanren on the banks of the Wuhouqin river” (至于今，烏侯秦水上有汗人數百戶). See *San guo zhi* 30.836. Of course, the “present” in this context should be understood as the mid-third century, the time when Wang Shen would have been compiling his *Wei shu*.

ventured across the ocean to capture the people of Wa (i.e., natives of Japan) and resettle them in Xianbei territory.⁷⁴

Both the *Hou Han shu* and the *Wei shu* account preserved in *Sanguozhi* of Xianbei close with a brief mention of the succession issues following Tanshihuai's death, throughout which the tribes became scattered and dispersed.⁷⁵ The account in the *San guo zhi* continues through the year 235 C.E., detailing the power shifts among Xianbei chieftains and their relations with the recently established Cao Wei state.

Kebineng

Following the continuation of Xianbei history into the early third century, as chronicled in the *San guo zhi*, out of the tangle of would-be successor chieftains, the leader Kebineng eventually emerged as the most powerful. Interestingly, Kebineng's biography in this account states that due to Yuan Shao's occupation of lands north of the Yellow river, the people of the central states fled northward for protection into Xianbei territory, and turned their allegiance to Kebineng. These "Zhongguo ren" then "taught him to fashion weapons, armor, and shields, and taught him some writing. Therefore he took Zhongguo as a model, and for when they would come and go to hunt, they established a banner standard, with drums sounding their approaches and retreats" (部落近塞，自袁紹據河北，中國人多亡叛歸之，教作兵器鎧楯，頗學文字。故其

⁷⁴ Gardiner and de Crespigny, "T'an-Shih-Huai and the Hsien-pi Tribes of the Second Century A.D.," 21n41.

⁷⁵ *Hou Han shu* 90.2994.

勒御部眾，擬則中國，出入弋獵，建立旌麾，以鼓節為進退。) ⁷⁶ Kebineng led auxiliary troops to fight under Cao Cao on more than one occasion, and periodically paid tribute to the Wei court, often in the form of horses. In recognition of the military assistance and tribute Kebineng had provided to the Wei court, Cao Pi in 220 C.E. named him “Fuyi wang” (附義王).

A few years later (in 224 C.E.), with chieftains of the three Xianbei divisions each vying for supremacy, the joint “Wuwan xiaowei” and “Hu Xianbei” (烏丸校尉；護鮮卑) title-holder, a man named Tian Yu 田豫, attempted to mediate the disputes. Tian Yu’s intervention was perceived as a betrayal by Kebineng, who reacted by attacking Tian Yu. Kebineng then allegedly wrote a letter appealing to the Wei court with his grievance. According to the record in the *San guo zhi*, Kebineng’s letter opens, “We Yi Di don’t know writing, so the *xiaowei* Yan Rou 閻柔 pledged on our behalf vis-à-vis the *tianzi* [i.e., we relied on Yan Rou to demonstrate our loyalty to the court]” (夷狄不識文字，故校尉閻柔保我於天子。) He accuses Tian Yu of siding with his rivals, including the chieftain Budugen 步度根, and declares that even though it is Budugen who continually plunders and loots, Tian Yu slanders Kebineng, saying that he is the plunderer. The closing of the letter proclaims:

我夷狄雖不知禮義，兄弟子孫受天子印綬，牛馬尚知美水草，況我有
人心邪！

Though we Yi Di may not know *li* (禮) or *yi* (義), our brothers, sons, and
grandsons receive the insignia of the son of heaven. Just as cattle and horses know
fine water and grass, how much more so do I with a human heart!

⁷⁶ *San guo zhi* 30.836.

He then appeals that his intentions (that is, his sincere loyalty) be conveyed to the *tianzi*, and Tian Yu is summoned by the emperor to surrender.⁷⁷ The text observes, “Kebineng’s tribe at this point became strong and powerful, with tens of thousands of mounted archers. After each raid, the spoils obtained would be equally divvied up among the tribe, and the tribe thus achieved its greatest strength. Chieftains of the other tribes all respected and feared [Kebineng], but he still didn’t equal Tanshihuai.”⁷⁸ The biography of Kebineng ends with his death in 235 C.E., at the hands of an assassin from Wei, and the historical narrative of the Xianbei in the *San guo zhi* account concludes at this point.

Judgments of the Historiographers

I now turn to examine the rhetoric that treats the northern other through an analysis of the historians’ judgments that appear in the *Hou Han shu* and *San guo zhi* texts. The historical critiques in both the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* narratives construe the succession of cultures that have emerged in the north as posing a continual threat to the Huaxia throughout history since the time of the Zhou.

The opening of the Wuhuan–Xianbei–Eastern Yi account in *San guo zhi*, authored by Chen Shou, lays out a historical process among the succession of cultures who had occupied the frontiers, with a specific focus on those who arose on the northern border:

⁷⁷ *San guo zhi* 30.839. The full text of the document is as follows: 夷狄不識文字，故校尉閻柔保我於天子。我與素利為讐，往年攻擊之，而田校尉助素利。我臨陳使瑣奴往，聞使君來，即便引軍退。步度根數數鈔盜，又殺我弟，而誣我以鈔盜。我夷狄雖不知禮義，兄弟子孫受天子印綬，牛馬尚知美水草，況我有人心邪！將軍當保明我於天子。

⁷⁸ *San guo zhi* 30.839.

書載「蠻夷猾夏」，詩稱「玁狁孔熾」，久矣其為中國患也。秦、漢以來，匈奴久為邊害。孝武雖外事四夷，東平兩越、朝鮮，西討貳師、大宛，開邛笮、夜郎之道，然皆在荒服之外，不能為中國輕重。而匈奴最逼於諸夏，胡騎南侵則三邊受敵，是以屢遣衛、霍之將，深入北伐，窮追單于，奪其饒衍之地。後遂保塞稱藩，世以衰弱。建安中，呼廚泉南單于入朝，遂留內侍，使右賢王撫其國，而匈奴折節，過於漢舊。然烏丸、鮮卑稍更彊盛，亦因漢末之亂，中國多事，不遑外討，故得擅（漢）〔漢〕南之地，寇暴城邑，殺略人民，北邊仍受其困。⁷⁹

In the *Shu* it is recorded, 'the Man and Yi disturb the Xia'; in the *Shi* it was said, 'the Xianyun were ablaze,'—long have they been the bane of the central states. Since the Qin and Han, the Xiongnu harmed the border for a long time....With the Xiongnu pressing the various Xia, the Hu horsemen invaded southward....

[After the Xiongnu were subdued], the Wuwan and Xianbei gradually became more powerful. They gained the territory of the southern desert, raided and committed violence in the cities and towns, marauding and massacring, and the northern frontier was often distressed.

Moreover, Chen Shou explicitly states that his purpose in compiling this account of the Wuhuan and Xianbei is to produce a complete record of the transformation of the four Yi by recounting history from the end of the Han period into the Cao-Wei (其習俗、前事，撰漢記者已錄而載之矣。故但舉漢末魏初以來，以備四夷之變云。)⁸⁰

Deliberately conflating the Xianbei and Wuhuan with the earlier Man, Yi, Xianyun, and Xiongnu, *San guo zhi* historiography thus places the Wuhuan and Xianbei into an unending cycle of power held by others whose shared *raison d'être* was to perpetuate violence against the Huaxia cultural order. Furthermore, the powerful northern nomadic tribes are singled out as being the most consequential incarnation of such outsiders since

⁷⁹ *San guo zhi* 30.831.

⁸⁰ *San guo zhi* 30.832.

the Qin and Han, and the succession among the *Hu* 胡 at the border follows directly from Xiongnu to Xianbei and Wuhuan.

In his *lun* (“disquisition”) appended to the account of the Wuhuan and Xianbei in the *Hou Han shu*, Fan Ye articulates a very similar principle that governs the history of the others: “As for the violence of the four Yi, their power alternates in turn to become the stronger” (四夷之暴，其執互彊矣。) ⁸¹ He then lays out a similar pattern on the northern frontier, from the Xiongnu through the Qiang, and then on to the Wuhuan and Xianbei, and bemoans the failure since the Zhou to devise an effective policy for defending against the brutality of the northerners:

匈奴熾於隆漢，西羌猛於中興。而靈獻之間，二虜迭盛，石槐驍猛，盡有單于之地，蹋頓凶桀，公據遼西之土。其陵跨中國，結患生人者，靡世而寧焉。然制御上略，歷世無聞；周、漢之策，僅得中下。將天之冥數，以至於此乎？ ⁸²

The Xiongnu blazed during the thriving Han; the Western Qiang grew ferocious in the [Guangwu] restoration. Throughout the reigns of Emperor Ling (r. 168–189) and Emperor Xian (r. 189–220), the two *lu* took it in turns to become the more numerous/prosperous. Tanshihuai was valiant and fierce, and took possession of the [northern] *shanyu*'s entire territory. Ta Dun was ferocious and cruel, and brazenly occupied the land of Liaoxi. As a result of their encroachments on the central states, they wreaked successive calamities upon the people, and there was no peace during their time. An effective policy for containing them has never been heard in all the generations, the Zhou and Han policies being only second-rate or lowest. The fate of Heaven, is this what it has come to?

Finally, Fan Ye denounces the nature of the two *lu* (the Wuhuan and the Xianbei) in his *zan* (“eulogy”), stating:

⁸¹ *Hou Han shu* 90.2994.

⁸² *Hou Han shu* 90.2994.

二虜首施，鯁我北垂。道暢則馴，時薄先離。⁸³

The two *lu* advance and retreat, causing havoc on our northern frontier. If the path is smooth, they become docile, but if the times are desperate, they are the first to break away.

This statement is intended primarily as a judgment on the morality of the northern other, as underlined by earlier rhetoric on the Xiongnu:

利則進，不利則退，不羞遁走。苟利所在，不知禮義。⁸⁴

If they have the advantage, they will advance; if not, they will retreat, and they are not ashamed to flee. As long as there is an advantage they will stay, and they know nothing of *li* and *yi*.

As nomads, the Wuhuan–Xianbei and the Xiongnu before them exploit the tactical advantage permitted by their mobility, a cause of consternation since the Han, but much more significant is the denunciation of the northern other as purely opportunistic and utterly ignorant of morality.

Fan Ye's *lun* articulates a historical cycle through which the hostile outsiders rise in power as others decline. Though in reality neither the Wuhuan nor the Xianbei truly matched the Xiongnu in unifying the northern tribes into a steppe empire during this period, the policy alternatives for dealing with these groups were generally similar, and as Fan Ye remarks, largely ineffective. There is an understanding here that all “others” subsumed within the category “Four Yi” have posed roughly equal threats to the state from Zhou through the end of Han. The nature of this constant threat becomes clear in Fan Ye's *zan*, in which he sums up the conundrum presented by the nomads: in terms of

⁸³ *Hou Han shu* 90.2995.

⁸⁴ *Shi ji* 110.2879; *Han shu* 94a.3743.

tactics, they are always able to retreat into their own widespread territory, which makes them very difficult to engage effectively from the perspective of the Han military. The mobility that marks the nomad also extends to their broader policy: they are opportunistic, and will always only pursue their own interests, and will refuse to honor agreements. Taken together, these two judgments by Fan Ye indicate the rather desperate situation of the Later Han vis-à-vis the Wuhuan and Xianbei: the Han was neither capable of defeating them militarily nor of practicing an effective *heqin* strategy to contain them.

Conclusion

The historiographers who wrote both the *Wei shu* excerpt cited in the *San guo zhi zhu* and the later *Hou Han shu*, through crafting an early ethnography of Xianbei (and Wuhuan), deftly slipped them into an older discourse on northern others. As mentioned above, the *Wei shu* text dates from the mid-third century C.E., and was the source text for the early fifth-century *San guo zhi zhu* ethnography of the Xianbei. The implication here is that the *Wei shu* account, originally composed a mere a few decades after the fall of the Later Han, was still considered relevant—or perhaps even more so—in the early decades of the Liu Song dynasty. The *Hou Han shu*, also compiled during the Liu Song dynasty, though not officially commissioned, as the *San guo zhi zhu* had been, includes an account of the Xianbei that in passages reads almost verbatim with the *Wei shu* account cited in *San guo zhi zhu*. In this case too, then, the account was still relevant to the present. By the early reigns of the Liu Song, the north seemed irretrievably lost; the eventual unification of the north by the Northern Wei in the mid-fifth century would only have underscored

such circumstances. In light of this, explications of the rise of the Xianbei would have been very pressing indeed.

Focusing on the judgments by Chen Shou and Fan Ye attached to the narratives of the Xianbei in the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu*, respectively, we find a remarkable similarity in the historical causation imputed to the emergence of the Xianbei throughout the Later Han and Three Kingdoms periods, despite the fact that these two texts were composed more than a century apart. Both commentaries reflect a certain resignation on the part of the historians, a recognition that an inevitable pattern exists throughout history (and, presumably into the present and future): the northern others, descendants of the *Hu*, will always arise, and always to the detriment of the Huaxia cultural order. Naturally, both texts were written from the perspective of the civilizational center (in Chen Shou's case, specifically the Western Jin; in Fan Ye's case, the Liu Song), though circumstances had changed dramatically between the dates that each text was composed.

Finally, the rhetoric deployed by both Chen Shou and Fan Ye also establishes another important point: through their historiography, they represented themselves as not just the inheritors of the Han, but indeed the only authoritative successors. Nevertheless, the accounts found in the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* are not the only surviving accounts of Xianbei origins. In the following chapters, I elucidate some alternative narratives of origins, which give rise to some very different implications.

Part II

Prologue: Other Origins of the Tuoba Xianbei

The preface to the *Wei shu* (魏書; *History of the Northern Wei*) introduces the geographical and genealogical origins of the Xianbei:

昔黃帝有子二十五人，或內列諸華，或外分荒服，昌意少子，受封北土，國有大鮮卑山，因以為號。¹

In antiquity, Huangdi had twenty-five sons; within, some of them arrayed [themselves] among the *zhuhua*, and without, some of them divided [themselves] across the *huangfu*. Chang Yi, the youngest son, was enfeoffed a northern land, a domain that contained the Great Xianbei Mountain(s), from which it took its name.

The passage asserts a prestigious lineage for the Tuoba that derives from the ancient sage-king Huangdi (the Yellow thearch), founder of the Chinese civilizational order. It then establishes an original political ruler over Xianbei ancestral territory, in the figure of Chang Yi. Perhaps most importantly, it designates the Xianbei land as having been originally incorporated into the cultural region ruled by Huangdi's offspring, despite its location within the *huangfu*, or wilderness zone.

The invocation of *zhuhua* and *huangfu* deserves further examination. *Zhuhua*, or the “various Hua [domains]” refers to the central states that represent the heart of the Chinese cultural order, and is a term found in early texts such as the *Zuo zhuan*. *Huangfu*, by contrast, is understood as “wilds,” “wilderness,” or even “wastes,” and its earliest surviving appearance is in the “Tribute of Yu” (“Yu gong” 禹貢) chapter of the *Shang*

¹ *Wei shu* 1.1.

shu 尚書.² It is the most distant of the five concentric zones envisioned in early cosmographical models of the world, and its inhabitants are accordingly the least civilized: the Rong 戎 and Di 狄. The “Yu gong” text specifically places *huangfu* five hundred *li* beyond the next inner zone, the *yaofu* 要服, which is inhabited by the Man 蠻 and Yi 夷. The “Five Zones of Submission” (*wufu* 五服) schema represents a cultural hierarchy in which the center is the royal or imperial capital and each region outward is the territory—or perhaps habitat—of those less and less civilized.³ The opening passage of the *Wei shu* preface thus acknowledges the territorial origin of the Tuoba Xianbei as a wilderness region at the edge of civilization, but then moves to forge a bloodline that links the Xianbei with the ancient sage-king who founded and ordered civilization.

The figure Chang Yi appears in the *Wudi benji* 五帝本紀 section of the *Shi ji* as one of two sons birthed by Huangdi’s principal wife Leizu 嫫祖.⁴ The progeny of these two sons would come to possess *tianxia* (黃帝居于軒轅之丘，而娶于西陵之女，是為嫫祖為黃帝正妃，生二子，其後皆有天下).⁵ According to the *Shi ji*, “the second [son of Huangdi] was called Chang Yi, and he descended to live at Ruo River” (其二曰昌意，降居若水). The Ruo River has been identified as located in the far southwestern region

² See “Yu gong,” in *Shang shu zheng yi* (158–205).

³ A detailed discussion of this conceptualization is found in Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China*, 271–273.

⁴ *Shi ji* 1.9–10, translated by Nienhauser in Nienhauser, ed., *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, vol. 1, 4–5, which is based primarily on the “Wudide” chapter of the *Da Dai Li ji*. See Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, 18n.

⁵ *Shi ji* 1.9–10.

of Shu.⁶ Chang Yi, though never a ruler himself, represents a critical node in the paternal bloodline, as the father of the Zhuangxu thearch 帝顓頊. Chang Yi's position is further underscored in the *Xia Annals* (夏本紀) of the *Shi ji*, which lays out the ancestral lineage of Yu 禹:

夏禹，名曰文命。禹之父曰鯀，鯀之父曰帝顓頊，顓頊之父曰昌意，昌意之父曰黃帝。禹者，黃帝之玄孫而帝顓頊之孫也。禹之曾大父昌意及父鯀皆不得在帝位，為人臣。⁷

Yu of Xia's praenomen was Wenming. Yu's father was Gun. Gun's father was Emperor Zhuangxu. Zhuangxu's father was Chang Yi. Chang Yi's father was Huangdi. Yu was the great-great-grandson of Huangdi and the grandson of the Emperor Zhuangxu. Yu's great-grandfather Chang Yi and his father Gun were both unable to gain the imperial position. They were vassals.

A very different text, the *Shan hai jing* 山海經, also contains a passage on Chang Yi, but intriguingly interposes the semi-human Han Liu 韓流 in the Huangdi lineage between Chang Yi and Zhuangxu:

流沙之東，黑水之西，有朝雲之國、司彘之國。黃帝妻雷祖，生昌意，昌意降處若水，生韓流。韓流擢首、謹耳、人面、豕喙、鱗身、渠股、豚止，取淖子曰阿女，生帝顓頊。⁸

East of the Desert of Shifting Sands and west of the Black River lies the Land of the Morning Clouds and the Land of the Overseer of Hogs. Lei Zu, wife of the

⁶ The *Suo yin* commentary locates Ruo River in Shu, and modern scholars have identified it as Yalong River 雅礮江. See *Shi ji* 1, 11n7; See also citation in Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 4n50.

⁷ *Shi ji* 2.49–50; translated in Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 21. Nienhauser also includes the explanatory note: “they were not emperors because although they led the Xia Clan, the Xia had not yet begun their dynasty by establishing suzerainty.” Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 21n4.

⁸ Yuan Ke, *Shan hai jing jiao zhu*, 503–504.

Yellow thearch, gave birth to Chang Yi, and Chang Yi descended to dwell at the Ruo River. He begat Han Liu. Han Liu has a long head, acute ears, a human face, a pig's snout, the body of a Lin, thighs as thick as cartwheels, and pig's feet. He married a daughter of Zhuo named Lady E, who gave birth to the thearch Zhuanxu.⁹

The significance of these earlier textual references is twofold: first, although Chang Yi is a son of Huangdi, he never inherits rulership; rather, his own son Zhuanxu inherits the reign over *tianxia*; second, in both the *Shi ji* and the *Shan hai jing* he is geographically associated with the far southwest—not the north. The common thread between the earlier narratives involving Chang Yi and that appearing in the *Wei shu* preface seems, therefore, to be merely Chang Yi's placement in a wilderness region—albeit a different one in each instance.

The *Wei shu* preface resumes with the history and development of the Tuoba clan of the Xianbei, as follows:

其後，世為君長，統幽都之北，廣漠之野，畜牧遷徙，射獵為業，淳樸為俗，簡易為化，不為文字，刻木紀契而已，世事遠近，人相傳授，如史官之紀錄焉。黃帝以土德王，北俗謂土為托，謂后為跋，故以為氏。¹⁰

Those throughout later generations became chieftains and united [the lands] north of Youdu, which were vast and empty wilds, and they migrated to raise animals and hunted as a main occupation. Their customs were honest and plain; their culture was simple and artless. They did not have writing, and would merely notch wood to record agreements. The people conveyed and received word of human affairs near and far, as though it were records of the historians. As Huangdi reigned through the virtue of earth, and as the northern custom was to

⁹ Translation by Strassberg, in Strassberg, trans. and ed., *A Chinese Bestiary: Strange Creatures from the Guideways through Mountains and Seas*, 224.

¹⁰ *Wei shu* 1.1. (The corresponding passage in *Bei shi* 北史 (*History of the Northern Dynasties*) appears in the modern edition with a different punctuation as follows: “其後世為君長” See *Bei shi* 1.1.)

pronounce earth “土” as “托 (*tuo*),” and to pronounce “后” as “跋 (*ba*),” “Tuoba” became their clan name.

This passage assigns a cultural primitivism to the Tuoba ancestors, recalling the earlier ethnographies of the Xianbei discussed in chapter 1, and reinforces their original geographical location as a remote wilderness beyond the far northern edge of the civilizational realm.

The reference to Youdu 幽都 demands closer attention. Its earliest appearance is in the “Yao dian” (堯典) chapter of the *Shang shu*. In his ordering of the (agricultural) realm, Yao installs four individuals in each of the four cardinal directions to regulate the four seasons in accordance with astronomical observations. Youdu is the extreme northern position in which Yao orders Heshu 和叔 to reside in order to precisely determine mid-winter: 申命和叔，宅朔方，曰幽都。平在朔易。日短，星昴，以正仲冬.¹¹ Commentators on the *Shi ji* and the *Han shu* have simply annotated Youdu as the north or northern region, or as a land in the northern wilderness. The *Shan hai jing* also describes a Youdu mountain (幽都之山), which in both instances is located in the north (either in the northern mountains or the northern sea), and in one passage is referred to as the source of the Black River 黑水, a place where all the creatures are dark in color

¹¹ “Yao dian” chapter in *Shang shu zheng yi*, 35–46. The corresponding narrative in *Shi ji*’s “Wu di ben ji” is very similar, but additionally specifies an agricultural function for each of the four directional positions. He Shu is charged with “regulating and overseeing the stores,” (便在伏物) in Nienhauser’s translation. Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, 6–8. See *Shi ji* 1.16–17, 19n20.

(玄).¹² That the *Wei shu* preface would situate the unified territory of the Tuoba in the wilderness of the far north—even beyond Youdu—emphasizes the spatial remoteness of its origins. Furthermore, the passage indicates that the Tuoba land lay outside the schematized order established by Yao, and depicts its people as pastoral nomads. Finally, the passage offers an etymological proof that Tuoba rulership indeed derived from Huangdi, with its claim that the name “Tuoba” derived from the northern pronunciation of “lords of the earth,” (*tuhou* 土后), following Huangdi who ruled through the element of earth.

The practice by cultural others of constructing a genealogy that traces back to the sage-kings of antiquity has a precedent in earlier texts, such as the *Zuo zhuan*. One well-known *Zuo zhuan* anecdote contains a very consequential narrative of the incorporation of a Rong tribe (the Jiang 姜 lineage) into the cultural order, and will serve as an example. A leader of the Rong tribe, in a dialogue with Jin administrators, retraces the history of his tribe, who, having been expelled by Qin, were then granted territory in the wilderness by a Jin duke upon his recognition of them as descendants of Siyue 四嶽 or 四岳 (Four Peaks), a ruler or rulers who lived under Yao.¹³ A notable feature shared by this *Zuo zhuan* example and the *Wei shu* preface is the relatively marginal status of the

¹² Appears in the “Hai nei jing” section of the *Shan hai jing*: 北海之內，有山，名曰幽都之山，黑水出焉。其上有玄鳥、玄蛇、玄豹、玄虎、玄狐蓬尾。有大玄之山。有玄丘之民。有大幽之國。有赤脛之民。Yuan Ke, *Shan hai jing jiao zhu*, 525–526.

¹³ Yang Bojun, ed., *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, 1005–1007. See David Schaberg’s discussion of this anecdote and broader analysis of the figure of the “sagely barbarian” in *Zuo zhuan* and *Guoyu*, in *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography*, 130–135. Schaberg remarks, “the assimilation of cultural barbarians begins with an acknowledgment of bloodlines, even very long ones, that lead back to the center” 376n38.

ancestor: neither Chang Yi nor Siyue were associated with the core areas of the civilizational sphere.

Returning to the *Wei shu* preface, the next section proceeds to trace Tuoba ancestry forward in time through another illustrious figure, Shi Jun 始均:

其裔始均，入仕堯世，逐女魃於弱水之北，民賴其勤，帝舜嘉之，命為田祖。¹⁴

[Chang Yi's] descendant Shi Jun entered official service in the generation of Yao, and chased the Drought Demoness¹⁵ north of the Ruo River.¹⁶ The people relied on his diligent efforts, and the thearch Shun commended him, ordering that he become Ancestor of the Fields.

The mapping of the Tuoba ancestor Shi Jun onto the ruling eras of Yao and Shun further intertwines the Tuoba lineage with the succession of the *wu di*, since the time of Huangdi.¹⁷ Interestingly, the account quoted above bears a suspicious resemblance to a

¹⁴ *Wei shu* 1.1.

¹⁵ The earliest known reference to the *hanba* 旱魃 is from the ode titled “Yun han” 雲漢 in the *Shi jing* 詩經 (no. 258): “The drought demon is vicious/Like a burn, like a blaze.” 旱魃為虐，如暎如焚。 See *Mao shi zheng yi*, 1401-1417. The *Shen yi jing* 神異經 (in an excerpt preserved in *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚) provides a description of a *ba* in the south as follows: “In the south there is a human, two or three *chi* in height, whose body is naked and whose two eyes are atop its head. It moves like the wind and is called *ba*. In states where it appears a great drought occurs, with red earth for a thousand *li*.” (*Yiwen leiju* 100.1723: 南方有人，長二三尺，袒身，兩目頂上，走行如風，名曰魃，所見之國大旱，赤地千里。)

¹⁶ A reference to the Ruo River appears in the *Shi ji*: “Between the Black Waters 黑水 and the West He 西河 was Yongzhou 雍州. After the Ruo Waters 弱水 had been led westward, the Jing 涇 was joined to the Wei from the north, and both rivers were made to flow smoothly.” Translation by Nienhauser in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 28. See also Nienhauser, 28n87: “The Ruo still has the same name—it flows northwest and then north through modern Kansu into Inner Mongolia and ends in a pair of lakes near the modern city of Ejinaqi 額濟納旗.”

¹⁷ According to the *Shi ji*, the succession of the *wu di* is as follows: Huangdi 黃帝→Zhuanxu 顓頊→Ku 嚳→Yao 堯→Shun 舜.

passage from the “Da huang bei jing” 大荒北經 section of the *Shan hai jing* 山海經. The expanded version of the narrative that appears in the *Shan hai jing*—with one critical difference in the cast of characters—presents the epic battle between Huangdi and the rebel Chi You 蚩尤, in which Huangdi commands Winged Dragon 應龍 to hoard up the water and the Drought Demoness 女魃 to stop the rain, thereby allowing Huangdi to kill Chi You:

有人衣青衣，名曰黃帝女魃。蚩尤作兵伐黃帝，黃帝乃令應龍攻之冀州之野。應龍畜水。蚩尤請風伯雨師，縱大風雨。黃帝乃下天女曰魃，雨止，遂殺蚩尤。魃不得復上，所居不雨。叔均言之帝，後置之赤水之北。叔均乃為田祖。魃時亡之，所欲逐之者，令曰：「神北行！」先除水道，決通溝瀆。¹⁸

There is a person wearing green clothing, and her name is Huangdi nūba. Chi You invented a weapon to battle with Huangdi, and Huangdi thereupon commanded Winged Dragon to attack him in the wilds of Jizhou. Winged Dragon hoarded up the water, but Chi You asked the Lord of Wind and the Master of Rain to unleash a great storm. Huangdi thereupon sent down his divine daughter named Ba; the rain ceased, and he then slew Chi You. Ba was unable to ascend back, and in the place she resides there is no rain.

Shu Jun reported this to the thearch (Shun), who then confined her north of the Chi River, with Shu Jun thereupon appointed Ancestor of the Fields. Ba at times escapes, and those who wish to expel her command: “God, go north!” Before doing so, clean out the water channels and dredge the canals and irrigation ditches.¹⁹

The *Shan hai jing* portrayal of the drought demoness is a distinctly ambivalent one, as she is transmogrified from a potent force in stanching the deluge in the service of her father Huangdi into an extremely destructive force after she is unable to return to her

¹⁸ Yuan Ke, ed., *Shan hai jing jiao zhu*, 490–491.

¹⁹ Translation by Strassberg (with minor modifications), in *A Chinese Bestiary*, 221–222.

original dwelling place.²⁰ In exiling the drought demoness, Shu Jun in the *Shan hai jing* version—or Shi Jun in the *Wei shu* version—is portrayed as the protector of agricultural production through ensuring stable irrigation and water management. Control of water (including the prevention of both drought and floods) figured significantly in the construction of early myth-history, and the successful banishment of a drought causing force to a contained area beyond the edges of the cultural sphere would naturally deserve special commendation. In other sections of *Shan hai jing*, Shu Jun (also known as Shang Jun) is identified variously as a nephew or grandson of Houji 后稷, and figures as Hou Ji’s successor in the task of inventing agriculture, attributed with having devised plowing.²¹ In both the *Wei shu* and *Shan hai jing*, then, the threatening figure of the drought demoness is a force to be expelled (northward), an act associated with the successful establishment of agrarian society and indeed the founding of human civilization.²²

²⁰ For further discussion on this figure, whom scholars have associated in the contexts of early shamanistic rituals, see Strassberg, *A Chinese Bestiary*, 222–223, and Derk Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China: New Year and Other Annual Observances During the Han Dynasty 206 B.C.–A.D. 220*, 104–106. See also Edward Schafer, “Ritual Exposure in Ancient China.”

²¹ Yuan Ke, ed., *Shan hai jing jiao zhu*, 532–534: 后稷是播百穀。稷之孫曰叔均，始作牛耕。“Hou Ji was the disseminator of the hundred grains. The grandson of [Hou] Ji is named Shu Jun, who first invented plowing with cattle.” See also Yuan Ke, ed., *Shan hai jing jiao zhu*, 449–451: 有西周之國，姬姓，食穀。有人方耕，名曰叔均。帝俊生后稷，稷降以百穀。稷之弟曰台璽，生叔均。叔均是代其父及稷播百穀，始作耕。“There is a country on the western perimeter, in which [the people] are surnamed Ji, and eat grain. There is a person who plows; his name is Shu Jun. The deity Jun sired Hou Ji, and [Hou] Ji descended with the hundred grains. [Hou] Ji’s younger brother is named Tai Xi, who sired Shu Jun. Shu Jun succeeded his father and [Hou] Ji in disseminating the hundred grains, and invented plowing.”

²² In his study on flood mythology in China, Mark Edward Lewis interprets the drought demoness’s staying behind in the realm of mortals as a “permanent sign in the world of the ordering work of the early sages,” an example of a pattern within the text of the *Shan hai jing*, in which “the geographic account...is littered with references to the physical traces of battles in which early godlike rulers had established an orderly world through defeating rebels and monsters in battle.” See Lewis, *The Flood Myths of Early China*, 67–68.

Within the context of the *Shan hai jing*, however, Shi Jun (始均), the narrative's hero in the *Wei shu* preface, and Shu Jun (叔均) seem to be two distinct figures. In the “Da huang xi jing” 大荒西經 chapter of *Shan hai jing*, Shi Jun, the purported ancestor of the Tuoba Xianbei in the *Wei shu* preface, is identified as Huangdi's grandson and progenitor of the northern Di 狄 tribes:

西北海之外，赤水之西，有天民之國，食穀，使四鳥。有北狄之國。黃帝之孫曰始均，始均生北狄。²³

Beyond the northwest sea, to the west of the Chi River, there is a country of heavenly people, who eat grain and use the four birds. There is a northern Di state. Huangdi's grandson is named Shi Jun, and Shi Jun sired the northern Di.

As noted above, the Rong and Di are the two groups of cultural others who inhabit the *huangfu* region (and thus are the least civilized), according to early cosmographical models. The connection between the northern Di and the Tuoba Xianbei within the sources—if indeed any exists beyond a spatial overlap—is unclear.

Finally, the preface of the *Wei shu* closes with the following:

爰歷三代，以及秦漢，獯鬻、獫狁、山戎、匈奴之屬，累代殘暴，作害中州，而始均之裔，不交南夏，是以載籍無聞焉。²⁴

Throughout the three dynasties and down to the Qin and Han, the Xunyu, Xianyun, Mountain Rong, Xiongnu and their ilk committed atrocities and laid waste to the central provinces generation after generation, yet since the descendants of Shi Jun did not have contact with the southern Xia, [the history of the Tuoba] has not been known through the records and documents.²⁵

²³ Yuan Ke, ed., *Shan hai jing jiao zhu*, 451–452.

²⁴ *Wei shu* 1.1.

²⁵ Holmgren explicates this passage in a similar vein: “The purpose of this passage is twofold: to explain the lack of records about the Tuoba during this time; and to set the Tuoba apart from the

Geographically isolated as they were, having emerged in a remote northern wilderness region, the Tuoba were distinct from the various rapacious tribes that occupied the northern frontier and continually raided the culturally central region to the south. Wei Shou, the author of the *Wei shu*, almost seems to be providing a direct response to the earlier historiographers of the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu*, who drew strong affiliations among the succession of northern others throughout history.²⁶ Finally, the preface offers an ingenious explanation for why the illustrious lineage of the Tuoba has not been known to history: the lack of communication with the southern Xia, those responsible for creating historiography.

In summary, the *Wei shu* preface offers a carefully crafted argument in favor of the Tuoba becoming civilized. Though the Tuoba Xianbei emerged in a wilderness region (*huangfu*) that is by definition inhabited by cultural others, the intertwining of Tuoba genealogy with Huangdi's patrilineage ascribes to the tribe a mythology that allows the Northern Wei to assert the legitimate inheritance of the ancient civilizational past.

Moreover, the narrative of Shi Jun, the progenitor of the Tuoba Xianbei, serves to construct a process of civilizing the land, through his expulsion of the drought demoness, signifying control over rainfall, and his consequent anointing as Ancestor of the Fields. His facilitation of agricultural production in the midst of the wilderness lays the ground for the analogous human civilizing process to unfold. Thus this account of Xianbei

common herd in their relationship with China.” Holmgren, *Annals of Tai: Tuoba History According to the First Chapter of the Weishu*, 80n6.

²⁶ See my discussion on the judgments of the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* historians in chapter 1.

origins may be understood as an answer to early cosmographical schema in which geographical territory and human culture were unitary.

If, as I discussed in chapter 1, the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* historiographers, through crafting an early ethnography of Xianbei (and Wuhuan), deftly slipped them into an older discourse on northern others, the later *Wei shu* preface, composed not long after the fall of the Northern Wei, rejected the insertion of the Xianbei into this discourse, and constructed an alternative account of Xianbei origins, one that firmly incorporated the Tuoba Xianbei into the Huaxia cultural order, albeit from a remote, peripheral position. Whether we as readers view it as artful crafting or outright fabrication, the significance of the *Wei shu* preface is in its purposeful appropriation of Huaxia cultural knowledge, which allows cultural authority to accrue to the Tuoba Xianbei, who would become rulers of the Northern Wei. In my more sustained analysis of the *Wei shu* annals that follows in chapter 2, I provide an interpretation of the narrative on earliest history of the Tuoba and their rulers, from the time of their emergence out of the wilderness.

Chapter 2

Early Tuoba Imperial Ancestors and Territorial Migrations

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the *Wei shu* narrative of early Tuoba history, primarily focusing on the “Prefatory Annals” (*xuji* 序紀) section of the “Imperial Annals” (*diji* 帝紀). This narrative opens with the succession of the earliest Tuoba tribal rulers, then follows through their territorial migrations, and finally culminates in the founding of the Tuoba state of Dai 代 in the mid-fourth century C.E. The narrative interweaves two predominant strands: the inheritance of power by the early Tuoba rulers, and the geographical movements of the Tuoba tribe. As a retrospective writing of pre-imperial Tuoba history, the *Wei shu* narrative is perforce teleological: the founding of the Northern Wei appears inevitable following the record of this “one hundred and sixty years” of Tuoba rule.

Through a careful reading of the “Prefatory Annals,” it becomes clear that the narrative of early Tuoba history inscribes a process of transformation from tribe to state; territorially, the narrative describes the journey from a vaguely defined wilderness land to an area with clearly demarcated boundaries. It may be thought of as a coming into focus of Tuoba territory; the movements are significant, but even more significant is the gradual process of defining a territory of their own.

The genealogy of early Tuoba rulers is retrospective in one striking and unique way: all of these past emperors were enshrined in the imperial lineage by Tuoba Gui, Taizu, Emperor Daowu, at the founding of the Northern Wei. Thus when reading through the “Prefatory Annals” historiography, one may imagine the “present” to be the reign of

Taizu. It was only during his reign that this royal Tuoba genealogy of the past was constructed, as will be clarified through my discussion in chapter 3 of the historiography on Taizu's dedication of the ancestral temple.

The first section of this chapter analyzes *Wei shu* historiography that covers the reigns of the earliest Tuoba “emperors” (帝) through fourteen generations of rulers, from Tuoba Mao 拓跋毛 through Tuoba Liwei 拓跋力微. The broad contours of this narrative are unification, movement southward, and then a second, much more lengthy and arduous journey southward to the land in which they finally settle. Through each of these southward migrations, the Tuoba ruler is guided by “spiritual” forces, in the first case from the advice of a *shenren* (神人), and in the second from the leadership of a *shenshou* (神獸). That these journeys were undertaken with divine intercession is highly significant within the early mythology of the Tuoba. From Tuoba Mao, posthumously anointed Emperor Cheng 成皇帝, through Tuoba Liwei, who would be honored as the Shizu Emperor Shenyuan 始祖神元帝, fourteen generations of rulers ascend to power.¹

The second section of this chapter resumes with my examination of *Wei shu* historiography on the reigns of successive emperors following Emperor Shenyuan and culminating in the rule of Tuoba Shiyijian 什翼犍, Emperor Zhaocheng 昭成. Shiyijian may be viewed as a model for the eventual founder of the Northern Wei, his grandson Tuoba Gui, whose reign is the focus of chapter 3. It is under the reign of Tuoba Shiyijian that a Tuoba state emerges for the first time, with his territorial conquest in almost all

¹ Tuoba Liwei's death in 277 C.E. closes this phase of early Tuoba rulers. A simple calculation of fourteen generations yields either 420 or 350 years (with a factor of either 30 or 25 years per generation) until Tuoba Liwei's ascendance as ruler in 220 C.E.

directions of the compass, the establishment of the new capital at Shengle, and the setting up of the altars, an act that had no precedent in previous reigns.

Early Tuoba Journeys

Tuoba Mao 拓跋毛 (Emperor Cheng 成皇帝)

According to the “Prefatory Annals” (*xuji* 序紀) section of the *Wei shu* “Imperial Annals” (*diji* 帝紀), the earliest Tuoba ancestor honored with a posthumous name was Tuoba Mao (毛), whose emperor name would be Cheng (成皇帝). The unification of the northern tribes is attributed to him:

聰明武略，遠近所推，統國三十六，大姓九十九，威振北方，莫不率服。²

Intelligent and skilled at military strategy, he was promoted by those near and far. He united the thirty-six states and ninety-nine great surnames. His might overawed the north, and there were none who did not submit.

Tuoba Mao is said to have ruled sixty-seven generations after Shijun 始均, the figure appearing in the preface to the *Wei shu* and discussed at length in the prologue to this part of my dissertation.³ Whether one calculates forward in time from a traditional dating for the time of Yao and Shun (circa 2210 B.C.E.), or backward fourteen generations from the historical dating of Tuoba Liwei, Tuoba Mao’s reign falls somewhere in the range

² *Wei shu* 1.1.

³ For the dating of these early Tuoba rulers, see Lin Gan, *Donghu shi*, 80–84. Lin Gan calculated back from the earliest time point of Shizu Emperor Shenyan (Tuoba Liwei)’s first reign year, a “gengzi” year, which corresponds to Wei Wendi (Cao Pi)’s Huangchu first year, or 220 C.E. Tuoba Mao’s generation, according to the *Wei shu*, was fourteen generations before that of Tuoba Liwei.

between 200 B.C.E. and 130 B.C.E. (depending on the factor used to calculate one generation—30 or 25 years).⁴ On the basis of this dating, Holmgren has concluded that “Tuoba Mao is clearly a mirror-image of the great historical figure, Modun,” and therefore one may infer that this narrative of early Tuoba rulers maps onto the history of the rise of the Xiongnu empire around the end of the third century B.C.E. and beginning of the second.⁵ The account of Tuoba Mao’s rule is vague, as is the description of the territory over which he is said to have ruled: no further details are provided beyond “the north.”

Tuoba Tuiyin 推寅 I (Emperor Xuan 宣皇帝)

The narrative of the early Tuoba succession continues with Tuoba Tuiyin 推寅, who ruled five generations after Tuoba Mao (the reigns of four emperors are listed in the records between Tuoba Mao and Tuoba Tuiyin, all of whom merely come to the throne then die). According to the *Wei shu*, it was Tuoba Tuiyin who first moved the Tuoba south from their original territory in the north. Tuoba Tuiyin, referred to as Emperor Xuan, “migrated southward to a great lake/marsh, which was more than one thousand *li* in circumference, and the soil there was dark and moist” (宣皇帝諱推寅立。南遷大

⁴ Lin Gan places the historical dates for Tuoba Mao as falling somewhere in the range between 200 B.C.E. and 130 B.C.E., depending on the factor used to calculate one generation (i.e., whether it is 30 or 25 years per generation). Peter Boodberg also calculated the approximate date of Tuoba Mao’s rule as being circa 200 B.C.E., on the basis of the correlation to a “Standard Chronology” based on Chinese traditions, if we assume that Shijun lived in the generation of Shun, or circa 2210 B.C., and one generation is counted as thirty years. See Boodberg, *Selected Works*, 233–234.

⁵ Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 19. See also her more general discussion of the problem of dating the early Tuoba ancestors, 18–22.

澤，方千餘里，厥土昏冥沮洳。).⁶ Though Tuoba Tuiyin had intended to move farther south, he apparently died before he could do so.⁷ Following the *Wei shu*'s internal relative dating, the generation of Tuiyin's rule may be placed around either 50 B.C.E. or 5 B.C.E., with the variation again dependent on which factor is used to calculate one generation.⁸

Tuoba Lin 隣 (Emperor Xian 獻皇帝); Tuiyin 推寅 II

Six named emperors are listed as following Tuiyin, until Tuoba Lin (隣) ascends as Emperor Xian (獻皇帝).⁹ The dates of Tuoba Lin's ruling generation may be placed around either 160 C.E. or 170 C.E. During his reign, a deity is recorded in the *Wei shu* as speaking to the state, advising the Tuoba to move elsewhere to settle. In the words of the deity, "this land is wild and remote, and it is not adequate for building a capital. It is appropriate to move again" (獻皇帝諱隣立。時有神人言於國曰：「此土荒遐，未足以建都邑，宜復徙居。」).¹⁰ Tuoba Lin, however, old and frail by that time,

⁶ *Wei shu* 1.2. Boodberg calculated Tuiyin's generation as falling in 50 B.C.E., which, he writes, "doubtless corresponds to the period of the break-up of the Xiongnu organization and the southern movement of northern tribes into the territory of the Xiongnu." Boodberg, *Selected Works*, 233–234. On the basis of recently discovered archaeological evidence, this *da ze* has been identified by modern scholars as Lake Hulun (呼倫湖) (Mongolian: Dalai nuur), in present-day Inner Mongolia. For a detailed analysis of the archaeological evidence, see Lin Gan, *Donghu shi*, 81–82.

⁷ *Wei shu* 1.2: 謀更南徙，未行而崩。

⁸ Lin Gan, *Donghu shi*, 82.

⁹ Confusingly, Tuoba Lin is also known as Tuiyin. See discussion below. To distinguish the two leaders both referred to as Tuiyin, I henceforth refer to them as Tuiyin I and Tuiyin II.

¹⁰ *Wei shu* 1.2. Tuiyin II (Tuoba Lin) is the link between this *Wei shu* historiography on the early Tuoba rulers and the earlier historiography from the *Wei shu* excerpt cited in the commentary to *San guo zhi* (in which Tuiyin 推寅 is referred to as Tuiyan 推演). As noted by Lin Gan, Tuoba

abdicates the emperorship to his son, and the move is not undertaken during his reign.¹¹

The interesting aspect of this record is the significance of the Tuoba territory as wild and remote. The narrative anticipates a time when the Tuoba would build a settlement, which they have not done up to this point. Most compelling is the implied movement toward a center (in stages), southward out of the hinterland, to a land that would be well suited for a capital.

Tuoba Jiefen 詰汾 (Emperor Shengwu 聖武)

The second migration southward is undertaken during the reign of Tuoba Jiefen (詰汾), or Emperor Shengwu (聖武), the son of Tuoba Lin, as narrated in the *Wei shu*.

Tuoba Jiefen's ruling generation falls around either 190 C.E. or 195 C.E. The passage follows:

獻帝命南移，山谷高深，九難八阻，於是欲止。有神獸，其形似馬，其聲類牛，先行導引，歷年乃出。

始居匈奴之故地。其遷徙策略，多出宣、獻二帝，故人並號曰「推寅」，蓋俗云「鑽研」之義。¹²

Emperor Xian had ordered [that they] move southward. The hills and valleys were tall and deep, with nine difficulties and eight obstructions, and they wished to stop (and not go on).¹³ [However], there was a spirit animal, which in shape resembled

Lin entered an alliance with Tanshihuai, and became the leader of the western part of the confederation. See Lin Gan, *Donghu shi*, 82. Boodberg also dates the reign of Tuoba Lin to c. 160 C.E. and points out that this would coincide with the “formation of the Xianbei confederacy under Tanshihuai.” Boodberg, *Selected Works*, 234.

¹¹ *Wei shu* 1.2: 帝時年衰老，乃以位授子。

¹² *Wei shu* 1.2.

¹³ Holmgren has a different understanding of this passage; cf. her translation: “They moved into a hilly terrain with valleys, gorges, natural defenses and passes. There they wanted to settle,” in her *Annals of Tai*, 52.

a horse, and in voice was like an ox, that walked ahead to guide and lead them on for several years then went away.

Since then, they occupied the former territory of the Xiongnu. Their migrations had scattered [the Tuoba], many had gone away from the two emperors Xuan and Xian, and therefore people called both of them “Tuiyin,” the customary way to say the meaning “Zuanyan” (to bore through).

The description of this second southward migration is far more dramatic, and the journey depicted far more hazardous and challenging. Interestingly, it is here that the two figures, Emperor Xuan and Emperor Xian are conflated into one Tuiyin, both honored with the epithet meaning “to bore through.” Both Tuiyins initiate migrations, and though the second Tuiyin does not actually undertake the journey, he orders it, so they are thus both referred to by the name “Tuiyin,” signaling their perseverance in overcoming the obstacles of the passage south.¹⁴

A condensed narrative of the two Tuoba migrations southward also appears as the opening passage of the “Treatise on Auspicious and Inauspicious Influences”

(“Lingzheng zhi” 靈徵志) in the *Wei shu*:

魏氏世居幽朔，至獻帝世，有神人言應南遷，於是傳位於子聖武帝，命令南徙，山谷阻絕，仍欲止焉。復有神獸，其形似馬，其聲類牛，先行導引，積年乃出。始居匈奴之故地。¹⁵

The Wei lineage occupied Youshuo for generations, and then during the reign of Emperor Xian (Tuoba Lin), there was a spirit-person who spoke that they should move southward. At that time the succession fell to Emperor Shengwu (Tuoba Jiefen), who ordered that they migrate south, but the mountains and valleys blocked and cut off [the way], so [he] desired to stop there. Again there was a spirit-animal, his shape like a horse, his voice similar to a cow, who ran ahead to

¹⁴ On this second southward migration, which scholars have placed as having occurred toward the end of the second century C.E., see Lin Gan, *Donghu shi*, 81–82; 84–85.

¹⁵ *Wei shu* 112b.2927.

guide and lead them on for years then went away. Since then, they occupied the former territory of the Xiongnu.

In each of the two moves southward, the Tuoba are represented as having been guided through supernatural intervention, in the form of the spirit-person (deity), and later the spirit-animal, an animal that some modern scholars have identified as perhaps a reindeer.¹⁶ The fact that this anecdote opens the section of the treatise on auspicious influences indicates that within the hierarchy of auspicious animals, the *shenshou* that purportedly led the Tuoba southward to establish a homeland was regarded as the most important. The treatise is organized not chronologically by reigns, but rather is structured by animal type; within the category of animal appearances, the ordering principle is apparently spiritual/semiotic significance, with the *shenshou* at the top, then in succession the *lin* 麟, *juxiang* 巨象, *gui* 龜, *wuse gou* 五色狗, *hu* 狐, *bailu* 白鹿 and *ni* 麋, etc., and finally a series of birds.¹⁷ In light of the very similar language in both the annals and the treatise, and based on our knowledge about the compilation of the *Wei shu*, it is quite likely that the treatise-writer (presumably the *Wei shu* editor Wei Shou himself) simply summarized the accounts in the annals section, and placed this anecdote in the prime position within the treatise. Moreover, the passage in the “Treatise on Auspicious and Inauspicious Influences,” as one might expect, emphasizes the anomalous but propitious

¹⁶ Sun Wei, *Xianbei kaoguxue wenhua yanjiu*, 73, 102, quoted in Holcombe, “The Xianbei in Chinese History, 5. Chen Sanping has even cited this as evidence of a “cervid cult” among the Tuoba that somewhat inexplicably also includes the *lin*, or unicorn. See his *Multicultural China in the Early Middle Ages*, 52–53.

¹⁷ Note that not all of the animals are grouped together: the rabbit 兔 section (subdivided into black rabbits and white rabbits) appears after the listing of certain propitious anomalies in the natural world.

appearance of these spirit beings. In this briefer narrative, it is their intervention that is the impetus for the two Tuoba migrations.

Tuoba Liwei 力微 (Shizu Emperor Shenyuan 始祖神元帝)

According to the *Wei shu*, Tuoba Liwei, who was posthumously named with the honorific title Shizu (始祖), or progenitor, and the temple name Emperor Shenyuan 神元,¹⁸ was miraculously conceived through a union between his father Jiefen and a daughter of heaven (*tiannu* 天女). The following *Wei shu* anecdote describes in detail his divine conception and birth:

初，聖武帝嘗率數萬騎田於山澤，欵見輜輶自天而下。既至，見美婦人，侍衛甚盛。帝異而問之，對曰：「我，天女也，受命相偶。」遂同寢宿。旦，請還，曰：「明年周時，復會此處。」言終而別，去如風雨。及期，帝至先所田處，果復相見。天女以所生男授帝曰：「此君之子也，善養視之。子孫相承，當世為帝王。」語訖而去。子即始祖也。故時人諺曰：「詰汾皇帝無婦家，力微皇帝無舅家。」¹⁹

帝崩。

Earlier, when Emperor Shengwu was leading many tens of thousands of riders through the fields and into the mountain marshes, he saw a screened chariot come down from the sky. As it approached, [he] saw a beautiful woman with many bodyguards. The emperor thought it strange and asked [about her], and the reply was, “I am a daughter of heaven, who was ordered to mate with you.” They then slept beside each other for the night. At dawn, she asked permission to return [to heaven], saying: “next year at the same time, we will again meet in this place.” When she finished speaking she parted from him, leaving like the wind and rain. When the appointed time for their meeting approached, the emperor went to the place in the fields where it had first happened, in order to see her again. The daughter of heaven yielded up the son she had born to the emperor and said, “this

¹⁸ According to the *Wei shu* annals, the name Shizu was bestowed upon Tuoba Liwei by Tuoba Gui (Taizu) when he came to power. *Wei shu* 1.5: 太祖即位，尊為始祖。

¹⁹ *Wei shu* 1.2–3.

is your son, raise and look after him well. [His] sons and grandsons will succeed each other one by one, to become emperors and kings.” She finished speaking and left. The son was Shizu. For this reason those of the age said, “Emperor Jiefen has no in-laws, and Emperor Liwei has no maternal relatives.”

The emperor [Jiefen] died.

Tuoba Liwei, beyond being born miraculously, is also recorded as having astounding longevity: on his death, the *Wei shu* account reports that, “in all he had ruled the state for fifty-eight years, and his age was one hundred and four *sui*.”²⁰ And as foretold by the *tiannu* (daughter of heaven) when she presented the infant Liwei to his father, Liwei’s descendants would indeed come to rule the Tuoba for generations.²¹

The overarching narrative of this exemplary figure Tuoba Liwei centers on his reign from his accession in 220 C.E. through his consolidation of the tribe. In the years that had preceded his rule, the *Wei shu* reports, the *guomin*²² had become scattered as the result of incursions by the western tribes. Through a successful military alliance with the Moluhui 沒鹿回部 tribe (with whom the Tuoba had sought protection), Liwei is granted territory for his tribe to settle on to the north, at Changchuan 長川.²³ Within a little over a decade, the annals state, “the transformative virtuous power [of Tuoba Liwei] spread

²⁰ *Wei shu* 1.5: 始祖尋崩。凡饗國五十八年，年一百四歲。太祖即位，尊為始祖。 Tuoba Liwei’s reign is recorded as ending in the year 277 C.E.; his rule therefore would have begun in 220 C.E. According to the account of his age at his death of 104 *sui*, his life dates would therefore be 174–277 C.E.

²¹ A clear genealogical line may be traced from Tuoba Liwei through the next four generations of rulers through Shiyijian (Emperor Zhaocheng), the grandfather of Tuoba Gui, who would become the first emperor of the Northern Wei, as will be detailed below.

²² On the concept of the *guomin* (國民) in the early Tuoba context, sometimes translated as “compatriot,” see Klein, “The Contributions of the Fourth Century Xianbei States to the Reunification of the Chinese Empire.”

²³ *Wei shu* 1.3. Holmgren identifies Changchuan as being located north of modern Xingle, in Inner Mongolia. Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 81n12.

wide, and all the old tribal people came to turn their allegiance [to the Tuoba]” (積十數歲，德化大洽，諸舊部民，咸來歸附).²⁴ Tuoba Liwei’s ability to draw in people of various tribal affiliations is not simply due to the positive force of his moral virtue, however; the *Wei shu* account also conveys Tuoba Liwei’s power to compel loyalty. Amid a succession dispute within the Moluhui tribe, Liwei uncovers a plot, summarily punishes the would-be usurpers, and absorbs not only all of their followers but all of the chieftains in charge of other tribes as well. In all, the *Wei shu* reports, those who newly pledged their submission to Liwei totaled more than two hundred thousand mounted archers.²⁵

Tuoba Liwei’s power reaches its apogee in the thirty-ninth year of his reign (258 C.E.), when he moves his tribe to the area of Shengle (盛樂).²⁶ The *Wei shu* annals describes his founding of the settlement as follows:

夏四月，祭天，諸部君長皆來助祭，唯白部大人觀望不至，於是徵而戮之，遠近肅然，莫不震懼。²⁷

In summer, in the fourth month, [Tuoba Liwei] sacrificed to heaven, and leaders of all the tribes came to assist in the sacrifice. Only the chieftain of the Bai tribe merely observed [the sacrifice] from a distance and did not approach, and [Liwei] thus summoned and killed him. Near and far [they were] reverent, and there were none who did not [regard him with] fear and awe.

²⁴ *Wei shu* 1.3.

²⁵ *Wei shu* 1.3: 二十九年，賓臨終，戒其二子使謹奉始祖。其子不從，乃陰謀為逆。始祖召殺之，盡并其眾，諸部大人，悉皆歛服，控弦上馬二十餘萬。

²⁶ Shengle in Dingxiang 定襄 has been located near modern Horinger (Ch. Helinge'er 和林格爾) in Inner Mongolia, specifically about six miles to the north. See Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization*, 24.

²⁷ *Wei shu* 1.3.

Tuoba Liwei's performance of the sacrifice to heaven—with audience participation—illustrates two aspects of his authority: a firm territorial establishment of his tribe in Shengle, and his supremacy over the other tribes. Liwei's status is represented in the *Wei shu* as extending beyond simply a *primus inter pares*, and is more akin to a sovereign, or at minimum, a suzerain.

Once he has ensured the submission of the other tribes, Liwei moves to determine a unified policy toward the state of Cao Wei. The policy speech, delivered to the assembled chieftains of the other tribes, is meant to differentiate the Tuoba (or, more precisely, the Tuoba-led alliance) from the northern tribes of the past whose strategy rested on continual raiding of the southern frontier. Though the primary critique of such a policy is at its core a moral one, the speech makes clear that Liwei's concerns are also quite pragmatic. The strategy of raiding the southern frontier is simply not sustainable, he argues in the speech:

始祖乃告諸大人曰：「我歷觀前世匈奴、蹋頓之徒，苟貪財利，抄掠邊民，雖有所得，而其死傷不足相補，更招寇讎，百姓塗炭，非長計也。」

於是與魏和親。²⁸

Shizu thereupon addressed all of the chieftains and said: “I have witnessed the past generations of followers of the Xiongnu and Tadun,²⁹ greedy and covetous of wealth and advantage, raid and plunder the frontier peoples, and though there was some gain [through the tactics], the loot seized was not worth the cost in casualties, so they again [had to] call together raids and hostilities. The hundred-surnames suffer in misery; it is not a long-term tactic.”

²⁸ *Wei shu* 1.3–4.

²⁹ Ta Dun (?-207 C.E.), leader of the Wuhuan tribe in Liaoxi during the Later Han, as introduced in chapter 1.

He thereupon extended [a policy of] *heqin* with the [Cao] Wei.

The logic of Tuoba Liwei's proposal is based on a rational cost–benefit analysis: continual raids do not secure enough material goods to be considered worth the costs of the violence in terms of lives. Moreover, the hearts and minds of the people will never be won over as long as they are exposed to the risks of the frontier raiding. Raiding is simply not an effective strategy when compared with the policy alternative of extending diplomatic relations with the southern state. And Liwei's policy is not only oriented to the south; the *Wei shu* records his establishment of ties with each of his neighboring states, with whom he conducted relations with sincerity and integrity, prompting “those near and far to turn their allegiance toward him and become dependent.”³⁰

Shamohan 沙漠汗

The *Wei shu* then narrates the Tuoba's extension of relations to the state of Cao-Wei, with an anecdote that entails one of Tuoba Liwei's sons, Shamohan 沙漠汗, and his experience as a diplomatic hostage in Luoyang. The purpose of Shamohan's stay in Luoyang is to “observe the local customs” (觀風土), and his first trip to the capital is recorded for the year 261 C.E.³¹ Shamohan, consistently referred to as Emperor Wen 文

³⁰ *Wei shu* 1.4: 始祖與隣國交接，篤信推誠，不為倚伏以要一時之利，寬恕任真，而遐邇歸仰。

³¹ *Wei shu* 1.4: 四十二年，遣子文帝如魏，且觀風土。魏景元二年也。

帝 in the *Wei shu*, has been designated heir to the Tuoba leadership (國太子), and as such is afforded the status of an “official guest of the Wei” during his stay.³²

The *Wei shu* describes a flourishing trade between the Tuoba and the Cao Wei throughout this period, recording gifts of golden brocades and silks offered from the Wei side. Following the change of regime from Wei to Jin in 265 C.E., Tuoba diplomatic relations are sustained, and six years after Shamohan first arrives in Luoyang, when he requests permission to return to the Tuoba state on the grounds that his father is becoming advanced in age, the Jin sends him off with gifts and an entourage.³³

In 275 C.E., Shamohan again travels to the state of Jin, where he stays for only a matter of months. The second visit is characterized as more of a trade mission, and Shamohan sets out from Luoyang laden with fine commodities from Jin: (“the Jin bestowed upon the emperor (Shamohan) brocades, cashmeres, silk, variegated silk and cloth, silk floss, and pongee, all in abundant quantities, filling one hundred ox-carts” 晉遺帝錦、罽、繒、綵、綿、絹、諸物，咸出豐厚，車牛百乘。).³⁴ When he attempts the journey home to the Tuoba state in winter of that year, however, his fate takes a dramatic turn.

In one of the lengthiest episodes in the early *Wei shu* annals, Shamohan becomes ensnared in a treacherous collusion between a rogue Jin military commander and a cabal

³² *Wei shu* 1.4: 文皇帝諱沙漠汗，以國太子留洛陽，為魏賓之冠。

³³ The year of Shamohan’s return to the Tuoba was 267 C.E. *Wei shu* 1.4: 文皇帝諱沙漠汗，以國太子留洛陽，為魏賓之冠。聘問交市，往來不絕，魏人奉遺金帛繒絮，歲以萬計。始祖與隣國交接，篤信推誠，不為倚伏以要一時之利，寬恕任真，而遐邇歸仰。魏晉禪代，和好仍密。始祖春秋已邁，帝以父老求歸，晉武帝具禮護送。

³⁴ *Wei shu* 1.4. Translation adapted from Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 55.

of lower Tuoba tribal leaders. On Shamohan's journey back to the Tuoba state, when he reaches Bingzhou 并州, the Jin general of northern expeditions Wei Guan 衛瓘, impressed—and apparently threatened—by Shamohan's extraordinary bravery, sends a secret request to the Jin emperor for permission to detain him, which is denied. Undeterred, Wei Guan then approaches leaders of the Tuoba state, bribing them with gold and silks, and ultimately persuades them to conspire in his plot. Planting suspicion in their minds, Wei Guan succeeds in distancing them from Shamohan, and the Jin emperor is finally convinced to order the detainment.³⁵ Reading between the lines, the implication here is that the Tuoba leaders express their doubts about Shamohan to the Jin officials in some way, thereby convincing the Jin emperor of Shamohan's "guilt":

行達并州，晉征北將軍衛瓘，以帝為人雄異，恐為後患，乃密啟晉帝，請留不遣。晉帝難於失信，不許。瓘復請以金錦賂國之大人，令致間隙，使相危害。晉帝從之，遂留帝。於是國之執事及外部大人，皆受瓘貨。³⁶

When [Shamohan and his entourage] reached Bing province, the Jin general of northern expeditions Wei Guan regarded the emperor (Shamohan) as extraordinarily brave, and feared that he would later cause harm. He secretly reported to the Jin emperor and requested permission to detain [Shamohan]. The Jin emperor did not believe him, and didn't allow [the detention]. Guan then invited leaders of the [Tuoba] state, bribing them with gold and silks, to provoke distance and suspicion, and bring harm. The Jin emperor then allowed it, and [Wei Guan] detained the emperor (Shamohan). Later the officials of the [Tuoba] state and leaders of the outer tribes all received Guan's gifts.

In Wei Guan's judgment, Shamohan represents a threat to the security of his own power, especially in view of the fact that Shamohan was nominated to become the next Tuoba

³⁵ See Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 22–26, for her analysis of these passages.

³⁶ *Wei shu* 1.4.

ruler. Wei Guan appears to be acting purely on the basis of his own interest, as the Jin general charged with keeping the Tuoba and other northerners at bay. Rather than permit Shamohan to return to the Tuoba and in due course take up his position as leader, Wei Guan seizes the opportunity to detain him, possibly while devising other schemes. Yet if Wei Guan's motivations are perhaps easy to understand, the actions of the Tuoba leaders are somewhat more complicated, as is illustrated in the next passage.

In the scene of Shamohan's release from detention two years later, the Tuoba leaders' suspicions, perhaps initially contrived, become very real after Shamohan displays an astounding feat, a skill he ostensibly learned from the southern Xia. Shamohan's strangeness in dress and behavior seem to pose an existential threat to the Tuoba leaders, who react in terror, and immediately take action to defend themselves and their positions. The entire anecdote follows:

五十八年，方遣帝。始祖聞帝歸，大悅，使諸部大人詣陰館迎之。酒酣，帝仰視飛鳥，謂諸大人曰：「我為汝曹取之。」援彈飛丸，應弦而落。時國俗無彈，眾咸大驚，乃相謂曰：「太子風彩被服，同於南夏，兼奇術絕世，若繼國統，變易舊俗，吾等必不得志，不若在國諸子，習本淳樸。」

咸以為然。且離間素行，乃謀危害，並先馳還。始祖問曰：「我子既歷他國，進德何如？」皆對曰：「太子才藝非常，引空弓而落飛鳥，是似得晉人異法怪術，亂國害民之兆，惟願察之。」

自帝在晉之後，諸子愛寵日進，始祖年踰期頤，頗有所惑，聞諸大人之語，意乃有疑。因曰：「不可容者，便當除之。」於是諸大人乃馳詣塞南，矯害帝。既而，始祖甚悔之。

帝身長八尺，英姿瓌偉，在晉之日，朝士英俊多與親善，雅為人物歸仰。後乃追諡焉。³⁷

³⁷ *Wei shu* 1.4–5.

In the fifty-eighth year (277 C.E.), the emperor (Shamohan) was returned. Shizu, hearing that the emperor was coming back, was overjoyed and sent all the tribal leaders out to Yinguan to welcome him. Drunk, the emperor (Shamohan) looked up and saw some birds in flight, and said to the leaders, “I will capture them for you.” [He] drew his crossbow and let the pellet fly, the bowstring resounded, and the birds were brought down. At the time the [Tuoba] state customs did not have the crossbow, and everyone was utterly shocked, and they remarked to each other, “the heir’s manner and clothing are the same as that of the southern Xia, and this strange magic is like no other. If he were to take over governance of the state, the old customs will change, and we will not be able to attain our aims. It would be better if the state remained in our hands, and the customs stayed pure and simple.”

All of them thought the same way. Since his conduct (*suxing*) was different from that of others, they plotted to kill him, and they rode swiftly ahead on the return. Shizu asked, “While my son has been in that other land, how has his moral virtue developed?” They all answered, “The heir apparent’s talents are indeed extraordinary—he drew an empty bow and took down some birds in flight. It seems to be some strange art or marvelous magic of the Jin people. It is a sign that portends destruction of the state and harm of the people, and we wish for you to look into it.”

While the emperor (Shamohan) had been staying in Jin, the favor bestowed on [Shizu’s] other sons had grown daily. Shizu was very advanced in age, and he often had some confusion. When he heard these words from the leaders, his mind turned suspicious. So he said, “This cannot be countenanced; he must be gotten rid of.” The leaders then rode swiftly south of the pass, and under these orders, killed the emperor. After this, Shizu was deeply regretful.

The emperor had been over eight *chi* in height, brave, handsome, and strong. When he was in Jin, the officials at court had all been close and familiar with him, and in character he had been known as trustworthy to the utmost. Later he was given a posthumous title [for these reasons].

Earlier in the anecdote, the Tuoba leaders, who are never referred to by name, are complicit in Wei Guan’s plot to cast suspicion on Shamohan, but it seems like they are in it for the bribes, and not out of any real belief that Shamohan is a threat. The narrative of Shamohan’s subsequent release and journey homeward, however, portrays the Tuoba leaders as sincerely terrified at Shamohan’s bizarre art of plucking birds from the sky with an arrowless bow. Shamohan’s mastery of this foreign technique signals his

divergence from the Tuoba customs, and his cultural difference is something to be quashed at once. The anecdote suggests that the Tuoba leaders view Shamohan's strange powers as representing a threat to their own military prowess, and thus their own authority. Implicit in the depiction of their fear is the possibility that Shamohan might have learned other strange arts from the southern Xia, arts that might be used against them if Shamohan were to inherit the position of Tuoba ruler. Shamohan, this sinister foreign being, is not even allowed to enter Tuoba territory, as the Tuoba leaders actually ride out of the pass to the south in order to exterminate him.

A brief epilogue to Shamohan's tale involves a Wuhuan prince who has infiltrated Shizu's circle of influence as Shizu approaches the end of his life. The scene follows:

其年，始祖不豫。烏丸王庫賢，親近任勢，先受衛瓘之貨，故欲沮動諸部，因在庭中礪鉞斧，諸大人問欲何為，答曰：「上恨汝曹讒殺太子，今欲盡收諸大人長子殺之。」大人皆信，各各散走。³⁸

始祖尋崩。凡饗國五十八年，年一百四歲。太祖即位，尊為始祖。

That year, Shizu became unwell. The Wuhuan prince Kuxian had become close to him and held sway over him. Prior to this, [Kuxian] had accepted Wei Guan's gifts, and therefore sought to shake up the tribes, so he ground his battle-axe within the courtyard, and when all of the tribal leaders asked why, he answered, "The emperor resents all of you for deceitfully killing the heir apparent, and now he seeks to take each of your eldest sons to kill." The leaders believed him, and they all scattered and fled.

Shizu later died. In all he had ruled the state for fifty-eight years, and his age was one hundred and four *sui*. When Taizu came to power, he honored him as Shizu.

The anecdote about Shamohan is represented as a tragedy, not only for Shizu personally, who bitterly regrets his own involvement in the death of his son and heir, but

³⁸ *Wei shu* 1.5.

also for the Tuoba state, which falls prey to the divisive tactics of first the Tuoba leaders and then the Wuhuan prince. It is also not difficult to speculate, based on the narrative, that a succession dispute was afoot, and that the tale of Shamohan's performance of dark arts from Jin conceals what is at its foundation a simple vying for power among Shizu's sons, and also quite possibly the factionalization of the Tuoba leaders. The motives of the Wuhuan prince are interpretable as simple self-interest, as he goes about sowing mistrust among the Tuoba leaders, all of whom seem to harbor a fair amount of guilt over the Shamohan affair. The Wuhuan prince's strategy proves effective: according to the *Wei shu* annals, the reign of the emperor who succeeds Shizu (another of Shizu's sons) is marked by discord among the tribes and disunity within the state (諸部離叛，國內紛擾).³⁹

Significantly, the *Wei shu* almost always refers to Shamohan by his posthumous imperial name, Emperor Wen 文帝, and an interesting coda to his story appears toward the end of the third century C.E. (296 C.E.), when regional officials from Jin are recorded as attending a reburial for him and his consort Feng (封氏), an occasion that over two hundred thousand people reportedly travel to attend.⁴⁰ Though Shamohan never ascends

³⁹ This is Tuoba Xilu 悉鹿, who ruled for nine years as Emperor Zhang 章. See *Wei shu* 1.5: 章皇帝諱悉鹿立，始祖之子也。諸部離叛，國內紛擾。饗國九年而崩。

⁴⁰ *Wei shu* 1.6. The reburial is recorded as occurring in the second year of the reign of Emperor Zhao (昭), or 296 C.E., or nineteen years after his death in 277 C.E.: 二年，葬文帝及皇后封氏。初，思帝欲改葬，未果而崩。至是，述成前意焉。晉成都王司馬穎遣從事中郎田思，河間王司馬顥遣司馬靳利，并州刺史司馬騰遣主簿梁天，並來會葬。遠近赴者二十萬人。

to the position of ruler,⁴¹ all of the future rulers of the Tuoba descend from his three sons, two of whom themselves ruled or co-ruled as *di* (帝).⁴²

Tuoba Territory Comes into Focus

Tripartite Division of the Tuoba State

Tuoba Luguan 祿官 (known as Emperor Zhao 昭), who reigned toward the end of the third century C.E., is said to have divided the Tuoba state into three discrete areas, which were ruled by himself and two other leaders.⁴³ The land was subdivided as follows: an eastern part, located to the north of Shanggu commandery 上谷郡 and west of the source of the Ru river 濡水; a middle part, located to the north of Canhepi 參合陂 in Dai commandery 代郡; and the area around “the old city” of Shengle 盛樂, in Dingxiang 定襄 (which had been the base for Tuoba Liwei’s rule).⁴⁴ It is important to note that these three vaguely defined areas, as described by the *Wei shu*, are not necessarily contiguous: the eastern area lay completely outside the Jin administrative unit of Shanggu (which was one of the commanderies that comprised Youzhou 幽州, as was Dai), while the middle

⁴¹ Shamohan’s youngest son, Fu 弗, did briefly occupy the position of Tuoba ruler as Emperor Si 思, the third to succeed to power after the death of Shizu, and his eldest son Yiyi, or Emperor Huan, and another of his sons, Yilu, or Emperor Mu, each co-ruled one of the three parts into which Emperor Zhao (Luguan) divided the Tuoba territory. *Wei shu* 1.5–6. Tuoba Fu’s son (and Shamohan’s grandson) Tuoba Yulü 鬱律 also later ruled as Emperor Pingwen 平文, coming to power in 317 C.E. *Wei shu* 1.9.

⁴² See “Genealogical Chart of Early Tuoba Rulers,” in Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 97.

⁴³ This year would be about 294 C.E.; the previous three rulers spanned a total of seventeen years from Shizu’s death in 277 C.E.

⁴⁴ *Wei shu* 1.5–6: 昭皇帝諱祿官立，始祖之子也。分國為三部：帝自以一部居東，在上谷北，濡源之西，東接宇文部；以文帝之長子桓皇帝諱猗罔統一部，居代郡之參合陂北；以桓帝之弟穆皇帝諱猗廬統一部，居定襄之盛樂故城。

area would also have been centered to the north of Jin administrative territory, as Canhepi lay just outside the great wall, but considerably farther to the west from the first area.⁴⁵ The third area, defined as Shengle, lay to the northwest of Bingzhou 并州, also outside the great wall. Though these three regions would all have fallen within a broad swath beyond the northern boundary of the Jin state, they were only loosely defined territorially, though the *Wei shu* states that the state was divided into three parts, indicating that the three areas would have all been encompassed within Tuoba territory. Within this tripartite division of Tuoba territory, Luguan himself rules the eastern portion, with Yiyi 猗鬻, Shamohan's eldest son, ruling the middle portion, and Yilu 猗廬, Yiyi's younger brother (and another of Shamohan's sons), ruling the western.

The *Wei shu* details Yilu's movements as he comes to settle around the vicinity of Shengle. He is recorded as "beginning to leave Bingzhou, migrating [his] *zahu* northward to move into Yunzhong, Wuyuan, and Shuofang."⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that the *Wei shu* represents the nature of his tribal population as being composed of diverse *hu* groups. Yilu not only migrates northward at this time, but also crosses the Yellow River westward to attack the Xiongnu and Wuhuan on his way. (Within the context of these movements, such an attack would have likely been near the northeastern area of the

⁴⁵ The Ru river is identified as the modern Qihe 漆河 (see Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 3:41–42.) Canhepi has been placed east northeast of modern Liangcheng 凉城, in Inner Mongolia, not far from Daihai 岱海. See Tan, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 4:52, but note that the date for that administrative map is 497 C.E., in Northern Wei territory. Canhepi does not appear in Tan Qixiang *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, vol. 3 for the dates under consideration.

⁴⁶ *Wei shu* 1.6: 是歲，穆帝始出并州，遷雜胡北徙雲中、五原、朔方。The year indicated would be 294 or 295 C.E. Note that Yunzhong, Wuyuan, and Shuofang are vaguely defined areas: they had all been abolished as administrative units (commanderies) toward the fall of the Later Han, in 214 C.E. See Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 83nn28–29.

Yellow River's great northward loop (east of the Ordos), and near the northeast–southwest diagonal of the Great Wall in this region.) Yilu then consolidates his newly settled territory by erecting a line of stelae to form the boundary with Jin.⁴⁷

Also during this period, Yiyi, co-ruler of the middle section of the Tuoba state, embarks on military expeditions across the northern desert to attack states in the west, and in the span of five years forces more than twenty (unnamed) states to submit to Tuoba rule.⁴⁸ As detailed above, the Tuoba are depicted as more firmly defining their territory throughout this period, and erecting monuments to mark the borders of their coalescent state. This tripartite division of Tuoba territory would last until Yilu unifies the three areas into one, as I will discuss in the following section.

The Tuoba State of Dai

The *Wei shu* narrative gathers considerable momentum with the formation of the Tuoba state of Dai in the early fourth century C.E. As discussed above, the *Wei shu* states that since the reign of Shizu, the Tuoba had maintained diplomatic relations with Jin, and

⁴⁷ The line of stelae were reportedly on either side of the road, following the line of the Great Wall, starting at a (western) terminus eighty *li* to the north of Xingcheng. See *Wei shu* 1.6: 又西渡河擊匈奴、烏桓諸部。自杏城以北八十里，迄長城原，夾道立碣，與晉分界。 Xingcheng, situated on the western bank of the Luo river, is north of modern Tongchuan 銅川市 in Shaanxi province. Xingcheng is not mapped in Tan, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, vol. 3 for Western Jin, as it would have been outside Jin territory, falling instead within Qiang territory. For an overview of Western Jin administrative territory in 281 C.E., not too long before the date under consideration, see Tan, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 3:33–34.

⁴⁸ The date of Yiyi's setting off would be 297 C.E., and his return would be in 301 C.E. *Wei shu* 1.6: 三年，桓帝度漠北巡，因西略諸國。七年，桓帝至自西略，諸降附者二十餘國，凡積五歲，今始東還。

that the period had been one of peace and prosperity.⁴⁹ Amid the tumultuous period that would later become known as the Sixteen Kingdoms era, the Jin, whose territory is continually encroached upon by various enemy groups, frequently requests military support from the Tuoba. A formal alliance between Yiyi, ruler of the middle Tuoba area, and Sima Teng 司馬騰, the Bingzhou *cishi* of Jin, is reportedly made in 304 C.E., after Yiyi contributes troops to quell the Xiongnu Liu Yuan's rebellion. The Tuoba later commemorate the alliance by constructing monuments at the site, which include an inscription.⁵⁰ The following year, after Yiyi sends "several thousand horsemen" to attack Liu Yuan again at Jin's behest, the rewards conferred on Yiyi by the Jin are the title of great *shanyu* as well as the imperial regalia of the gold seal and purple ribbon.⁵¹ (Interestingly, the Tuoba are not represented in the *Wei shu* as ever referring to their own rulers as *shanyu*, a title more closely associated with previous *Hu* groups, most prominently the Xiongnu. It might be therefore be interpreted slightly ironically that the Jin bestowed a leadership title on the Tuoba that was originally associated with the Xiongnu in reward for defeating a Xiongnu leader.)

This pattern repeats itself during the reign of Yilu, who assumes power after the deaths of both Yiyi and Luguan, according to the *Wei shu*. Yilu, who ruled as Emperor

⁴⁹ *Wei shu* 1.6: 自始祖以來，與晉和好，百姓乂安，財畜富實。This statement is largely at odds with the portrayal of the three rulers who came between Shizu and Lugan.

⁵⁰ The more complete story, which includes the hostage taking of Jin Emperor Hui 惠, is found in *Wei shu* 1.6: 十年，晉惠帝為成都王穎逼留在鄴。匈奴別種劉淵反於離石，自號漢王。并州刺史司馬騰來乞師，桓帝率十餘萬騎，帝亦同時大舉以助之，大破淵眾於西河、上黨。會惠帝還洛，騰乃辭師。桓帝與騰盟於汾東而還。乃使輔相衛雄、段繁，於參合陂西累石為亭，樹碑以記行焉。

⁵¹ *Wei shu* 1.6–7: 十一年，劉淵攻司馬騰，騰復乞師。桓帝以輕騎數千救之，斬淵將綦毋豚，淵南走蒲子。晉假桓帝大單于，金印紫綬。

Mu, unites the three parts of the Tuoba territory into one (in the year 307 C.E.), from his original power center in Shengle, at the western edge of Tuoba land. The Jin official in charge of Bing province, Liu Kun 劉琨, has sent envoys to the Tuoba, along with his own son Zun 遵 as a diplomatic hostage (in 310 C.E.) and in the same year, he requests military defense from Yilu to repel the Tiefu 鐵弗 and the Bai 白 tribes, each of whom had invaded Jin territory. The twenty thousand Tuoba horsemen Yilu dispatches rout the enemy tribes. It is this act that prompts the Jin emperor (Huai) to enfeoff Yilu as the Duke of Dai (代公), as well as to confer on him the title of great *shanyu*.⁵²

It is important to recognize, however, that Yilu's title as duke of Dai at this point is somewhat imprecise: the land that Jin enfeoffed to Yilu is actually located in the northwestern corner of the Jin administrative unit of Bingzhou, as will be clarified in the next passage, which lay far to the southwest of Dai Commandery. Therefore, as Holmgren has pointed out, "the appellation Dai to this era of Tuoba history is somewhat of a misnomer," or at minimum a loosely applied geographical designation.⁵³

The territory granted to Yilu was also quite distant from his own regional Tuoba domain, which was located in the area around Shengle. According to the *Wei shu* account, after some negotiation, Liu Kun ultimately grants Yilu a walled settlement in the northwest corner of Bingzhou:

⁵² *Wei shu* 1.7: 白部大人叛入西河，鐵弗劉虎舉眾於雁門以應之，攻琨新興、雁門二郡。琨來乞師，帝使弟子平文皇帝將騎二萬，助琨擊之，大破白部；次攻劉虎，屠其營落。虎收其餘燼，西走度河，竄居朔方。晉懷帝進帝大單于，封代公。

⁵³ Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 36. The name Dai as applied to the location of Dai Commandery originates with the Warring States settlement of Dai within the state of Zhao. During the Han, the area of Dai was a fiefdom with its own regional ruler, who held the title Daiwang (代王).

帝以封邑去國懸遠，民不相接，乃從琨求句注陁北之地。琨自以託附，聞之大喜，乃徙馬邑、陰館、樓煩、繁峙、崞五縣之民於陁南，更立城邑，盡獻其地，東接代郡，西連西河、朔方，方數百里。帝乃徙十萬家以充之。

The settlement enfeoffed to the emperor (Yilu) was distantly removed from the [Tuoba] state, and the people did not have contact with each other, so the emperor requested from [Liu] Kun the land that lay to the north of Gouzhu pass. [Liu] Kun had entrusted himself and pledged his allegiance to the emperor (Yilu), and was greatly pleased when he heard [the request]. He thereupon moved his people in the five prefectures of Mayi, Yinguan, Luofan, Fanzhi, and Guo to the area south of the pass, and moreover established a walled settlement to offer up that encompassed all of his land from Dai Commandery in the east, to Xihe and Shuofang in the west, several hundred *li* in length. The emperor [Yilu] then moved in a hundred thousand [Tuoba] families to fill [the land].⁵⁴

After his enfeoffment, Yilu's territory is represented as comprising a contiguous area stretching from the western boundary of Dai Commandery (in Jin) to the region north of the Ordos, with a newly carved-out section of land to the south. (Yilu's contribution of horsemen to defend Liu Kun and the Jin are not always portrayed as successful: in campaigns against Liu Cong and Shi Le, the Jin suffer a humiliating—and nearly fatal—defeat, despite Tuoba support.⁵⁵)

Yilu then establishes capitals for his newly demarcated territory, an act that is unprecedented in the *Wei shu*'s account of early Tuoba history. (Though Tuoba Liwei is

⁵⁴ The Gouzhu pass (one of the “nine ancient passes” 九塞) was located to the north of modern Daixian, in Shanxi province, and the Gouzhu mountains were located very near the Great Wall, in the western section of Yanmen Commandery 雁門郡, Bingzhou, and lie to the northwest of modern Daixian 代縣, in Shanxi province. During this period, the mountains were also known as the Xingling 陁嶺. See Tan, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 3:39–40. All of these prefectural centers were located in Yanmen Commandery. See Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 3:39–40 for detailed locations, and Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 85n49. Xihe was a commandery in Bingzhou centered near modern Lishi 離石, Shanxi province, and Shuofang, the area north of the Yellow River northern loop. For Shuofang, See Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 4:7–8. Shuofang does not appear in Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, vol. 3.)

⁵⁵ This defeat was recorded for the year 312 C.E. See *Wei shu* 1.8.

recorded as previously occupying the area of Shengle, the *Wei shu* does not indicate that it was a capital per se at that time.) The description of Yilu's building of the capitals is as follows:

六年，城盛樂以為北都，修故平城以為南都。帝登平城西山，觀望地勢，乃更南百里，於灑水之陽黃瓜堆築新平城，晉人謂之小平城，使長子六脩鎮之，統領南部。⁵⁶

In the sixth year (313 C.E.), [the emperor] constructed Shengle as the northern capital, and restored the old Pingcheng to become the southern capital. The emperor [Yilu] ascended the hills to the west of Pingcheng, and gazed out over the lay of the land. He then went south one hundred *li*, and built New Pingcheng on Huanggua hill, on the northern bank of the Lei River.⁵⁷ The Jin referred to it as Little Pingcheng, and [Yilu] sent his eldest son Liuxiu to fortify it and govern the southern part [of his territory].

Yilu and Liu Kun continue their mutually advantageous relationship, joining forces against Shi Le and Liu Cong, and the Jin emperor promotes Yilu to Daiwang (代王) in 315.⁵⁸ Yet Yilu's reign is cut short by his death the following year; his son Liuxiu is responsible for his assassination.⁵⁹

Tuoba Yülü (鬱律), posthumously named Emperor Pingwen (平文), assumes power in the historically critical year of 317 C.E., and with the death of the last Jin

⁵⁶ *Wei shu* 1.7.

⁵⁷ The Lei River is modern Sanggan River 桑干河. The southern capital Pingcheng was located inside (south of) the Great Wall, near the site of the modern city of Datong 大同市 in Shanxi Province. New Pingcheng was located south southwest of Pingcheng, just beyond the northern border of Jin Bingzhou. See Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 3:39–40.

⁵⁸ Diplomatic offices were also established in the two commanderies of Dai and Changshan. (Changshan was the commandery located directly to the south of Dai commandery.) *Wei shu* 1.9: 八年，晉愍帝進帝為代王，置官屬，食代、常山二郡。

⁵⁹ The account of Yilu's death in the *Wei shu* Annals is exceedingly vague, but more details may be found in the biography of Lixiu, *Wei shu* 14. See also Holmgren's analysis of this episode, in Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 36–39.

emperor at the hands of the Xiongnu, he laments, “the central plains are now without a ruler,” and appeals to heaven for aid and protection: 帝聞晉愍帝為曜所害，顧謂大臣曰：「今中原無主，天其資我乎？」⁶⁰ Under his reign, Tuoba territory expands considerably, to the extent that, according to the *Wei shu*, Tuoba-controlled lands “in the west encompassed the former territory of the Wusun former territory, and in the east swallowed up the area west of Wuji,” and the Tuoba by this time allegedly boast a military force of one million mounted archers.⁶¹ Within a few years of Yulü’s accession, he has spurned diplomatic overtures from the “usurper” Sima Rui, founder of the successor state Eastern Jin, and eventually summons his troops, with an intent to “pacify *nanxia*.”⁶² (Yulü’s loyalties are represented as lying only with the now-defunct Western Jin: he rebuffs envoys sent by the Xiongnu to ask for peace, then beheads the envoys sent by Shi Le of the Jie 羯, king of the newly founded state of (Later) Zhao, who had wished to establish a *xiong-di* (兄弟) relationship with the Tuoba.⁶³) Yulü’s ambition does not

⁶⁰ *Wei shu* 1.9.

⁶¹ Yulü is the son of Tuoba Fu 弗, Emperor Si 思帝, and the grandson of Shamohan. *Wei shu* 1.9: 西兼烏孫故地，東吞勿吉以西，控弦上馬將有百萬。The Wusun had occupied the area near the northwestern border of modern Xinjiang province. Wuji lay north of Gaogouli (Koguryo), according to *Wei shu* 100.2219. See also Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 87n66–67. Holmgren asserts that the area west of Wuji “surely lay well outside Tuoba control at this time,” indicating that this greatly expanded territory was an exaggeration.

⁶² In 321 C.E. *Wei shu* 1.9: 五年，僭晉司馬叡，遣使韓暢加崇爵服，帝絕之。治兵講武，有平南夏之意。

⁶³ See *Wei shu* 1.9–10.

come to fruition, however; he is assassinated within four years on the command of the Empress Dowager Wei, who installs her own infant son Heru 賀儻 as ruler.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, Yulü is later honored with the title *taizu* (太祖), at the time of the Northern Wei founding in 398 C.E.⁶⁵ Though the reasons for this are not explicitly stated in the *Wei shu*, one may imagine that Yulü, retrospectively, would have been the only ruler in the Tuoba lineage to qualify as *taizu*; the two rulers in Tuoba Gui's paternal line prior to Yulü were Shamohan, who never assumed power but was the designated heir to the throne and his son Tuoba Fu, who ruled for only one year then died. Yulü is therefore the linchpin in the lineage, as the forebear of Shiyijian, whose reign will be examined toward the end of this chapter. As we will see, Yulü's declared intention to conquer the central plains would be the first of two such instances during this period; the second would come during the reign of Shiyijian.

In the fourth year of his reign period (324 C.E.), Heru takes over power from his mother, and soon after transfers the Tuoba capital to a walled city he had built near the remote East Mugen Mountain 東木根山, with the explanation for this being, tellingly, that “the tribesmen had not all been sincere in their obedience.”⁶⁶ It would be no leap of interpretation to understand this move as a retreat, and Heru dies the following year.

⁶⁴ Lady Wei was the consort of Emperor Huan 桓帝, Yiyi. The son she placed in power was Yiyi's middle son, Heru 賀儻, known as Emperor Hui 惠帝.

⁶⁵ *Wei shu* 1.10.

⁶⁶ *Wei shu* 1.10: 四年，帝始臨朝。以諸部人情未悉欵順，乃築城於東木根山，徙都之。 East Mugen Mountain was located north northeast of Pingcheng, thus in the deep interior of Tuoba territory. See Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 4:9–10; 15–16.

In the ensuing decade, the reigns of Tuoba Hena 紇那 (Emperor Yang 煬帝) and Yihuai 翳槐 (Emperor Lie 烈) are marked by contention between two powerful outside tribes, the Helan 賀蘭 and Yuwen 宇文, with involvement as well by Shi Le 石勒 and his successor Shi Hu 石虎 (of the recently founded state of Later Zhao). The *Wei shu* records a series of abrupt shifts in the support of the *guoren* in this period, and each ruler, Hena and Yihuai, is forced from power and later restored exactly once. Tuoba Yihuai ultimately prevails, and in 337 C.E. he is recorded as building the walled city of New Shengle ten *li* to the southeast of the original site. Yihuai's triumph is short-lived however; he dies only one year later (in 338 C.E.).⁶⁷

Tuoba Shiyijian 什翼犍, Emperor Zhaocheng 昭成

In a familiar trope, Shiyijian, the second son of Tuoba Yulü (Emperor Pingwen 平文), who is destined to rule the Tuoba throughout the middle of the fourth century C.E., exhibits extraordinariness even from birth:

昭成皇帝諱什翼犍立，平文之次子也。生而奇偉，寬仁大度，喜怒不形于色。身長八尺，隆準龍顏，立髮委地，臥則乳垂至席。烈帝臨崩顧命曰：「必迎立什翼犍，社稷可安。」

烈帝崩，帝弟孤乃自詣鄴奉迎，與帝俱還。十一月，帝即位於繁峙之北，時年十九，稱建國元年。⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Wei shu* 1.10–11. Tuoba Hena was the younger brother of Heru (Emperor Hui). Tuoba Yihuai was the eldest son of Yulü (Emperor Pingwen).

⁶⁸ *Wei shu* 1.11–12. Shiyijian was Yihuai's younger brother, and when Yihuai ascended to power, he had sent Shiyijian to the capital of Later Zhao (Xiangguo), accompanied by five thousand families. (See *Wei shu* 1.11.) At the time of Yihuai's death, Shiyijian was still in the state of Zhao, in its current capital of Ye, which is why Gu travels to Ye to meet him.

Emperor Zhaocheng, Shiyijian, came to power. He was the second son of [Emperor] Pingwen. As soon as he was born, [it was clear that] he was extraordinarily strong, and greatly lenient and humane. Neither joy nor anger would show in his expression. In height he was eight *chi*, with a regal face. When he stood his hair would sweep the ground, and when he lay down his nipples would hang down to the mat. When Emperor Lie was on the verge of death, he looked back to command thus: “Shiyijian must be placed in power, and the *sheji*-altars may be pacified.”

Emperor Lie died, and [Shiyijian’s] younger brother Gu went to Ye to welcome him as ruler, and returned together with the emperor. ... In the eleventh month, the emperor ascended to the throne north of Fanzhi.⁶⁹ At the time he was nineteen *sui*, and he proclaimed the first year of the Jianguo [reign].

True to his reign name, Shiyijian proceeds to found a Tuoba state upon his accession as ruler in 338 C.E. The year after proclaiming the new reign, Shiyijian institutes a bureaucracy, if on a limited scale: he “began to set up the hundred offices and delegated authority among the offices.” Furthermore, he considerably expands the territorial reach of Tuoba power; the *Wei shu* records, “from the Huimo 濊貊 in the east to the Poluona 破洛那 in the west, none were not sincerely allegiant.”⁷⁰ Later that year, he assembles tribal leaders at Canhepi to discuss the establishment of a capital for the new state; a proposal to build the capital at Leiyuan River (灑源川) is ultimately abandoned after

⁶⁹ As noted above, Fanzhi was located in Yanmen Commandery, south of Pingcheng, and to the southwest of modern Hunyuan County 渾源縣, Shanxi Province. See Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 3:39–40.

⁷⁰ *Wei shu* 1.12: 二年春，始置百官，分掌眾職。東自濊貊，西及破洛那，莫不款附。 The Huimo tribe was apparently located to the south of Koguryo. Poluona (or Dayuan guo 大宛國 in *Shi Ji* and *Han shu*) refers to Ferghana, located to the west of the Wusun tribe. See Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 89n87. Historians (including Holmgren) find this a highly dubious claim, as it would mean that Tuoba territory essentially encompassed the entire breadth of the steppe from the Korean peninsula to an area within modern Kazakhstan.

leaders fail to reach an agreement.⁷¹ In spring of the following year (340 C.E.), Shiyijian establishes a capital at Shengle palace in Yunzhong (雲中之盛樂宮), and in the year after that, he constructs the walled city of Shengle a little to the south of the original site.⁷²

In a scene that strongly resonates with the much earlier account of Tuoba Liwei's sacrifice to heaven, Shiyijian convenes the tribes on the occasion of dedicating the altars:

五年夏五月，幸參合陂。秋七月七日，諸部畢集，設壇埽，講武馳射，因以為常。八月，還雲中。⁷³

In the fifth month of the fifth year (342 C.E.), [the emperor] went to Canhepi.⁷⁴ In autumn, on the seventh month of the seventh day, all the tribes were gathered together, [they] set up the *tanlie*-altars, discussed martial [affairs] and [practiced] mounted archery, which then became a custom (regular event). In the eighth month, [the emperor] returned to Yunzhong.

Though the *Wei shu* account does not record the performance of sacrifices to heaven and earth, the altars mentioned in the account were of course associated with such sacrifices. Both this description of Shiyijian's assembly of the tribes and that of Liwei's (discussed earlier) are marked by their communal nature, and signal a kind of hegemony over all the tribes. The installation of the altars and the practice of martial arts, such as mounted

⁷¹ See Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 3:61 for an overview of Xianbei territory during the late Western Jin, and the location of the Leishui (灑水), which runs loosely east-west, south of Pingcheng.

⁷² *Wei shu* 1.12: 三年春，移都於雲中之盛樂宮。 *Wei shu* 1.12: 四年秋九月，築盛樂城於故城南八里。

⁷³ *Wei shu* 1.12.

⁷⁴ Canhepi, identified above, was located east of Shengle and northwest of Pingcheng and was never considered a capital. According to Tan Qixiang, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 4:52 map, Canhepi was located a little over forty miles to the east of Shengle.

archery, appear to be naturally intertwined activities within the cultural context of the early Tuoba leaders. Also significant is the date of this event, falling as it does on the seventh day of the seventh month, and which according to the account would become a regularly held event at that time of year.

Represented as having effectively exerted his power over the northern tribes, Shiyijian next proposes a pacification of the regions to the south of Tuoba territory—the central provinces—in the pivotal year of 351 C.E., soon after the collapse of the Later Zhao state.

十四年，帝曰：「石胡衰滅，冉閔肆禍，中州紛梗，莫有匡救，吾將親率六軍，廓定四海。」乃敕諸部，各率所統，以俟大期。諸大人諫曰：「今中州大亂，誠宜進取，如聞豪強並起，不可一舉而定，若或留連，經歷歲稔，恐無永逸之利，或有虧損之憂。」帝乃止。

是歲，氐苻健僭稱大位，自號大秦。⁷⁵

In the fourteenth year (351 C.E.), the emperor said, “The Shi-lineage of the *Hu* is in decline, Ran Min has caused disaster,⁷⁶ the central provinces are in disarray, and there is none who can offer salvation. I shall personally lead the six armies to settle the [land within] the four seas.” Then he ordered each of the tribes to lead those under their command, in order to prepare for the momentous occasion. All of the tribal leaders remonstrated, “The central plains are indeed now in great chaos, and it is appropriate to advance and take them, but if strong elites were to join together to rise up, we would not be able to quell them in a short time. If it were to become protracted, lasting through the years, then we fear that we will lose the advantage [brought by] our long-term stability, and instead have the distress of many losses.” The emperor then desisted.

That year, the Di Fu Jian usurped the great title, and proclaimed the great Qin.

⁷⁵ *Wei shu* 1.13.

⁷⁶ The Shi-lineage of the *Hu* refers to the rulers of Later Zhao, who descended from the founder Shi Le 石勒. Shi Hu 石虎 (r. 334–349 C.E.) was overthrown by the ethnically Han Ran Min 冉閔 who declared the founding of the [Ran-] Wei in 350 C.E., and undertook an extraordinarily destructive “ethnic cleansing” campaign that targeted Hu 胡 and Jie 羯 peoples living within the borders of Zhao.

The Tuoba tribal leaders, reluctant to dive into a very complex political situation in the south, advise Shiyijian to bide his time, and await a more opportune moment to strike. Ominously, Shiyijian's agreement to hold off on an attack seems to open a space for Fu Jian's founding of Qin, the state that would disrupt Tuoba unity in the north within the span of a few decades. The speech by Shiyijian recalls an earlier Tuoba ruler's declaration of his intent to conquer the south—that of Tuoba Yulü following the fall of the Jin. Indeed, this scene marks the second instance in which a Tuoba leader has declared his intent to conquer the south, only to have his ambition thwarted by the other tribal Tuoba rulers. In the ensuing years of Shiyijian's reign, he is described as continually embarking on imperial tours and successfully subduing neighboring tribes in nearly all directions, until his death amid unclear circumstances in 376 C.E. The *Wei shu* records that his grandson Tuoba Gui honored Shiyijian as *gaozu* 高祖 when he ascended the throne.⁷⁷

It is during Shiyijian's reign that Tuoba Gui's father makes his only appearance in early *Wei shu* historiography. Tuoba Shi 寔, posthumously named Emperor Xianming 獻明皇帝, would never come to power, though he had been named the heir apparent. A would-be assassin named Changsun Jin attempts to kill Shiyijian and is consequently put to death. Shiyijian's son, Tuoba Shi valiantly intercepts the attack to defend Shiyijian but later dies of the wounds he sustained. Tuoba Gui, the "imperial grandson" (皇孫) is born

⁷⁷ *Wei shu* 1.16.

two months hence.⁷⁸ Tuoba Shi would acquire his emperor name and be installed as an imperial ancestor under the rule of his son Tuoba Gui.

In the historian's comments that close this first section of the *Wei shu* annals, in which the editor Wei Shou recapitulates pre-imperial Tuoba history, Shiyijian is memorialized as the ruler who inaugurated the Tuoba empire:

昭成以雄傑之姿，包君子之量，征伐四克，威被荒遐，乃立號改都，恢隆大業。⁷⁹

[Emperor] Zhaocheng had the comportment of a brave hero, and possessed the judgment (ability to weigh) of a *junzi*. Through his military expeditions he subjugated the four [directions], and his power covered the remote wilderness. He thereby set up his reign and moved the capital, and vigorously energized the imperial project.

According to the *Wei shu*, it was by virtue of his valor and martial prowess that it was possible for the Tuoba to ultimately attain rule over all the land; the nearly three decades of his reign represents the culmination of almost one hundred and sixty years of Tuoba rule since the generation of Tuoba Liwei. As the historian states, “in the end, throughout the one hundred and sixty years, [the Tuoba] came to expansively possess all the world” (終於百六十載，光宅區中).⁸⁰ The historian regards as inevitable the Tuoba conquest, as throughout their rule, they had acted in accordance with the wishes of heaven, and had consequently been aided in their efforts.

⁷⁸ This brief anecdote is recorded for the 34th year of Shiyijian's reign, or 371 C.E. See *Wei shu* 1.15: 三十四年春，長孫斤謀反，伏誅。斤之反也，拔刃向御座，太子獻明皇帝諱寔格之，傷脅。夏五月，薨，後追諡焉。

⁷⁹ *Wei shu* 1.16.

⁸⁰ *Wei shu* 1.16.

Conclusion

As I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter, the construction of the imperial lineage occurs retrospectively, at the founding of the Northern Wei under Tuoba Gui. It is only in Tuoba Gui's reign that the past rulers of the Tuoba would acquire their posthumous emperor names. Moreover, it is only in Tuoba Gui's reign that such rulers would be enshrined as imperial ancestors. The imperial lineage that is constructed for this early historical era in the third and fourth centuries C.E. maps a direct paternal line from Tuoba Liwei, the Shizu Emperor Shenyuan; through his son Tuoba Shamohan, Emperor Wen; through his youngest son Tuoba Fu, Emperor Si; through his son Tuoba Yülü, the Taizu Emperor Pingwen; through his son Tuoba Shiyijian, the Gaozu Emperor Zhaocheng, then finally to his son Tuoba Shi, Emperor Xianming, and Tuoba Gui's father. Interestingly, two of these six imperial ancestors who descend from Liwei (Tuoba Shamohan and Tuoba Shi) do not accede to power, but only attain the status of designated heirs. At the time of his dedication of the ancestral temple one year after founding the Northern Wei (in 399 C.E.), the first emperor Tuoba Gui would enshrine only the preceding five "emperors" through his father Tuoba Shi, leaving out Shamohan. The historiography of the early Tuoba state thus not only narrates the territorial migrations of the Tuoba tribe, but also superimposes onto this history an anachronistic imperial lineage, one that is only constructed in the time of the emergence of Tuoba Gui and his transformation of the Tuoba state into the Northern Wei empire.

Chapter 3

Ritual and Imperial Authority in the Founding of the Northern Wei

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the narrative of Tuoba Gui 拓跋珪, the founder of the Northern Wei, and the representation of his reign in *Wei shu* historiography. Tuoba Gui's rule may be divided into two discrete historical phases: that of the pre-imperial Tuoba state of Dai/Northern Wei; and that from the founding of the imperial state of the Northern Wei through the end of his rule. The first period opens in 386 C.E., the year in which Tuoba Gui proclaims himself the king of Dai (代王), and then later in the same year changes his title to king of Wei (魏王). This pre-imperial phase lasts until 398 C.E., the year that Tuoba Gui acceded as emperor of the Northern Wei. The second period lasts from 398 C.E. until the end of Tuoba Gui's reign, on his death, in 409 C.E. The central concern of this chapter is imperial authority, as represented through *Wei shu* historiography that treats Tuoba Gui's reign. In what ways is Tuoba Gui represented as asserting his imperial authority, first as king, then as emperor of the Northern Wei state? What were the modes of this imperial authority? Finally, how is imperial authority intertwined with cultural authority in the historiographical representation of the early Northern Wei?

In order to answer these inquires, I offer close readings of *Wei shu* narratives from the "Imperial Annals" (Diji 帝紀), as well as those from the treatises, especially the "Ritual Treatise" ("Lizhi" 禮志), and to a lesser extent the "Treatise on Auspicious and Inauspicious Influences" ("Lingzheng zhi" 靈徵志) and the "Treatise on Music"

(“Yuezhi” 樂志). I hope, in this way, to synthesize the multiple perspectives found in the different sections of the *Wei shu* text. As is well known, the ten *Wei shu* treatises were composed after the compilation of the other two sections (annals and biographies); moreover, the treatises were authored by Wei Shou as original works, and in all likelihood did not draw on earlier historiographical materials, as the other sections did. For this reason, it is appropriate to think of the *Wei shu* as a kind of stratified text, my approach to which is to read across the multiple versions of the Northern Wei founding and reign of its inaugural emperor, Tuoba Gui.

The structure of this chapter broadly follows the chronological unfolding of the narrative found in the *Wei shu*: the first section introduces the figure of Tuoba Gui and traces the historiography that covers his ascendance to the position of king of Dai (and soon thereafter, king of Wei), through the close of the pre-imperial phase. In this section, I interpret the significance of Tuoba Gui’s highly auspicious birth, as well as an early prediction of his illustrious destiny. I then analyze the account of Tuoba Gui’s ritual practice following his accession as ruler; his embarkation on imperial tours in each of the four cardinal directions; and a pair of anecdotes that signify his future achievements as unifier.

The second section of the chapter focuses on Tuoba Gui’s accession as the first emperor of the Northern Wei, Taizu 太祖, Emperor Daowu 道武. In that section I focus on the narratives that treat his accession, including his acceptance of the mandate of heaven and other preparations for transforming the Wei into an imperial state, as well as the description of his actual accession to the position of emperor. I maintain that each of the actions taken by Tuoba Gui at the moment of his founding of the imperial state, such

as the deliberations on the new state name, the building of the new capital at Pingcheng, and the institution of new ritual protocols, broadly conform to the standards of an culturally Han dynasty.

I then examine in detail the record of Taizu's practice of imperial ritual, especially his institutionalization of ancestor worship and his performance of the suburban sacrifices. I argue that in spite of the *Wei shu*'s attestation that the Northern Wei emperor adhered to the Zhou prescriptions for the suburban sacrifices—specifically with respect to the worship of heaven and earth—the accounts of his performance of such rituals hints at the persistence of Tuoba ritual practice.¹ As emperor, Tuoba Gui rarely enacted the “orthodox” version of the suburban sacrifices (whether we understand that to mean either the Zhou ritual texts or Han precedent), but instead is portrayed as continuing an earlier Tuoba tradition of heaven worship throughout his reign, and furthermore, seems to have also practiced forms of the suburban sacrifices that simply defy categorization. Through this in-depth analysis of early Northern Wei imperial ritual practice, I hope to shed light on the apparent tensions between the cultural authority wielded by the Tuoba ruler, and the founding of an imperial state.

Tuoba Gui 拓跋珪

Tuoba Gui, the future emperor of the Northern Wei, is represented in the *Wei shu* as predestined to rule over *tianxia*. Auspicious portents from the natural world appear at the moments of his miraculous conception and birth, and his extraordinary physique from his infancy through youth is the subject of much commentary and interpretation by

¹ I am indebted to Kang Le for his extensive work on the subject of Tuoba imperial ritual.

observers, according to the earliest narrative involving Tuoba Gui in the “Imperial Annals” section. The passage that narrates Tuoba Gui’s birth is excerpted below:

太祖道武皇帝，諱珪，昭成皇帝之嫡孫，獻明皇帝之子也。母曰獻明賀皇后。初因遷徙，遊于雲澤，既而寢息，夢日出室內，寤而見光自牖屬天，欵然有感。以建國三十四年七月七日，生太祖於參合陂北，其夜復有光明。昭成大悅，羣臣稱慶，大赦，告於祖宗。保者以帝體重倍於常兒，竊獨奇怪。明年有榆生於埋胞之坎，後遂成林。弱而能言，目有光曜，廣頰大耳，眾咸異之。年六歲，昭成崩。²

Taizu, Emperor Daowu, taboo name [Tuoba] Gui, was the grandson of Emperor Zhaocheng (Tuoba Shiyijian), and the son of Emperor Xianming (Tuoba Shi).³ His mother was Xianming’s Empress He. Previously when they were migrating about, roaming through Yunche, they had been resting when [Empress He] dreamt that the sun rose from her chamber. She awoke and saw a heavenly ray of light from the window, and suddenly she conceived.

In the thirty-fourth year of Jianguo (371 C.E.), on the seventh day of the seventh month,⁴ she birthed Taizu north of Canhepi, and that night there again appeared a radiant light. [Emperor] Zhaocheng was greatly pleased. All the officials offered congratulations, and a general amnesty was declared. [The birth] was announced to the ancestors. [Tuoba Gui’s] wet nurses noticed that he weighed twice as much as a normal infant, and they wondered at his extraordinariness. The following year an elm tree sprouted in the spot where the placenta had been buried, and later it became a grove of elms. While still young, [Tuoba Gui] was already able to speak, and his eyes contained a radiant brilliance. [He had] a broad forehead and large ears, and everyone marveled at him. When he was six *sui* (377 C.E.), [Emperor] Zhaocheng (Shiyijian) died.

The *Wei shu* narrative of Tuoba Gui’s birth recalls a much earlier narrative involving a miraculous conception, that of the unifying Xianbei leader Tanshihuai 檀石

² *Wei shu* 2.19.

³ Tuoba Gui’s father, Tuoba Shi, never acceded to the position of emperor, as I discuss at the end of chapter 2. Though he had been named heir apparent, he died defending his father Shiyijian (Emperor Zhaocheng) from an assassination attempt. According to the *Wei shu*, Tuoba Shi’s death occurred two months prior to the birth of his son Tuoba Gui.

⁴ Holmgren has speculated that “the historian... chose the day of [Tuoba Gui’s] birth to correspond with the important autumn gathering of the tribes on the seventh day of the seventh month each year.” See Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 93n131.

槐 (c. 136–181 C.E.), which I discussed at length in chapter 1. According to that earlier account found in both the *San guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu*, Tanshihuai was conceived through his mother’s swallowing of a hailstone that had fallen from the sky into her mouth. Some scholars have theorized that the “saga” of Tanshihuai represents a fragment of Xianbei oral tradition that was only later written into the historical accounts of the Xianbei mentioned above.⁵ The parallels between Tuoba Gui and Tanshihuai also extend, of course, to their exceptional destinies as unifiers and brilliant leaders of their tribes.

Yet if the narrative of Tuoba Gui’s miraculous conception and birth is perhaps a vestige of a Xianbei-rooted trope, the description of Tuoba Gui’s extraordinary physique also draws on another historiographical tradition found in texts such as *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji*. In this narrative tradition, physical distinctiveness often leads to predictions of future rule as king or emperor.⁶ Indeed, the observation of Tuoba Gui’s corporal aspects—his exceptional birth weight, his height as a young man, his broad forehead and large ears—move an astute observer, Liu Kuren,⁷ to utter a prophecy to his own sons. The annals note, “though still young, [Tuoba Gui] was nevertheless tall and stood out from the crowd” (帝

⁵ See Gardiner and de Crespigny, “T’an-Shih-Huai and the Hsien-pi Tribes of the Second Century A.D.,” especially pp. 12–24. Holmgren also observes that a similar narrative appears in the *Wei shu* account of Koguryo in *Wei shu* 100. See Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 93n130.

⁶ Among the most well known examples of this is the narrative of Chong Er 重耳 (whose name literally means “Double Ears”) from *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji*, in which the observation of his distinctive physical features inspires predictions—which turn out to be very accurate—of his future rule of Warring States Jin. See Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 107–108.

⁷ The Tiefu 鐵弗 were a branch of the Liu-surnamed Xiongnu, the founders of the Han–Zhao state. See Holmgren for further discussion about this rival tribe, whom she characterizes as “a threat to Tuoba consolidation and expansion in the fourth century.” Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 109. Liu Weichen would become a powerful enemy of Tuoba Gui. (The son of the last Tiefu leader would change his surname from Liu to Helian 赫連. This was Helian Bobo 赫連勃勃, who established the state of Xia in 407 C.E.)

雖冲幼，而嶷然不羣).⁸ Liu Kuren interprets the significance of Tuoba Gui's height, and predicts: “the emperor (Tuoba Gui) has the will to rule *tianxia*, and to restore the great empire and glorify the ancestors. He must be taken as the ruler” (帝有高天下之志，興復洪業，光揚祖宗者，必此主也).⁹ In this way, Tuoba Gui's destiny is boldly foreshadowed in the narrative.

Pre-Imperial Dynasty

Tuoba Gui's ascendance to the position of Daiwang (代王 king of Dai) marks the opening of the Dengguo (登國) reign period in 386 C.E. A detailed record of Tuoba Gui's accession appears in the *Wei shu* “Imperial Annals”:

登國元年春正月戊申，帝即代王位，郊天，建元，大會於牛川。復以長孫嵩為南部大人，以叔孫普洛為北部大人。班爵叙勳，各有差。二月，幸定襄之盛樂。息眾課農。¹⁰

In the first year of the Dengguo reign period, in spring, on the *wushen* day of the first month, the emperor ascended to the throne as king of Dai, [performed the] *jiao*-sacrifice to heaven, founded the new reign, and held a great gathering at Niuchuan. He then [appointed] Changsun Song as chieftain of the southern tribes, and Shusun Puluo as chieftain of the northern tribes. Ranks and titles were conferred according to merit. In the second month, the emperor went to Shengle in Dingxiang. He increased the population [there] and instructed [the people] in agriculture.¹¹

The “Ritual Treatise” (“Lizhi” 禮志) also records the occasion of Tuoba Gui's accession,

⁸ *Wei shu* 2.19.

⁹ *Wei shu* 2.19.

¹⁰ *Wei shu* 2.20.

¹¹ Holmgren calculates the exact date of Tuoba Gui's ascendancy to king of Dai as February 20, 386 C.E. See Holmgren, *Annals of Tai*, 77.

though far more tersely: “In the first year of the Dengguo reign period of Taizu, [Tuoba Gui] assumed the throne as king of Dai at Niuchuan, set up the *ji*-worship toward the west, and announced to heaven the completion of the rites” (太祖登國元年，即代王位於牛川，西向設祭，告天成禮).¹²

In a strictly Han imperial context, the performance of the suburban sacrifice to heaven (*jiaotian* 郊天) was meant to be undertaken exclusively by the emperor, generally within a few years of his accession to power.¹³ Tuoba Gui’s arrogation to himself of the right to perform the suburban sacrifice to heaven would have been a contravention of ritual protocol, especially after the codification of imperial ritual practice during the Han. Yet the representation in the *Wei shu* annals and “Ritual Treatise” of Tuoba Gui’s ascendance to the position of king of Dai and his performance of the sacrifice to heaven is perhaps something other than a Han imitation. As I will elucidate in detail in the following section, the sacrifice to heaven toward the west, in summer, in the fourth month, is strikingly different from the Han ritual. The accounts of Tuoba Gui’s worship of heaven during the pre-imperial period more likely reflect a long-standing practice of Tuoba Xianbei culture, which had derived from earlier Xiongnu (*Hu*) tradition. As Kang Le asserts, this historical instance of heaven worship by Tuoba Gui was likely the traditional Tuoba ritual, and not the Han imperial suburban sacrifice to heaven.¹⁴ The

¹² *Wei shu* 108a.2734.

¹³ For a discussion of the suburban sacrifices generally and the history of the sacrifices to heaven through the Sui, see Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 107–112.

¹⁴ See Kang Le, “An Empire for a City: Cultural Reforms of the Xiaowen Emperor,” 63n94: “...since the Northern Wei was not yet founded at the time, it seems quite unlikely for Tuoba Gui to perform a traditional Han Chinese imperial ceremony, especially the heaven worship performed by Tuoba Gui in A.D. 386 aimed at claiming the legitimate rulership over the Tuoba people, instead of Han Chinese.”

Wei shu “Imperial Annals” record a second instance in which a sacrifice to heaven (*citian* 祠天) was performed, in the sixth year of the Dengguo reign period (391 C.E.), in summer, in the fourth month, while Tuoba Gui was still king of Dai, which should also be considered as the representation of the Tuoba ritual practice.¹⁵

Later in the same year (386 C.E.) that he ascended as ruler (in the fourth month), Tuoba Gui changed his title from Daiwang (代王), or king of Dai, to Weiwang (魏王), king of Wei, according to the annals.¹⁶ (It is for this reason that the founding year for the Northern Wei dynasty is traditionally regarded as 386 C.E.) His rationale for changing the name of his state from Dai to Wei is presented later in the annals, following his declaration of the new imperial state. In the twelfth month of that year, Tuoba Gui also declined an offer by Murong Chui 慕容垂 of the royal insignia as *shanyu* of the west, and enfeoffment as prince of Shanggu, according to the annals.¹⁷ Murong Chui extended this offer in the same year that he had declared the founding of (Later) Yan and “illegitimately” proclaimed himself emperor in Zhongshan.¹⁸

During his first reign period of Dengguo, which spanned eleven years from 386–396 C.E., Tuoba Gui is depicted as undertaking imperial tours (*xun* 巡) in each of the four cardinal directions: east (in 388 C.E.); west (in 390 C.E.); south (in 393 C.E.), and

¹⁵ *Wei shu* 2.24: 夏四月，祠天。The reference to a *ci*-sacrifice (祠) is possibly connected to the ancient springtime sacrifice of the same name (though on this instance it clearly was recorded as occurring in summer, the fourth month), but since the characters *ci* 祠 and *si* 祀 are cognates, we should probably understand *citian* 祠天 as meaning “sacrifice to heaven” in a broader sense.

¹⁶ *Wei shu* 2.20–21: 夏四月，改稱魏王。

¹⁷ *Wei shu* 2.21: 十二月，慕容垂遣使朝貢，奉帝西單于印綬，封上谷王。帝不納。

¹⁸ See *Wei shu* 2.21.

north (in 394 C.E.).¹⁹ Gui embarked on each of these expeditions in the spring: in either the first, second, or third months of the year, and it is notable that the record of such tours is quite terse, offering no explanation for the purpose of these excursions. While Tuoba Gui's itinerary differs from the idealized journey carried out by the legendary emperor Shun (whose travels inscribed a circular pattern, from east to south to west and finally to the north, in relation to his capital), the fact that exactly one tour is recorded for each of the four directions undoubtedly implies that Tuoba Gui's expeditions were intended to represent the consolidation of his rule over the surrounding territory. Whether Tuoba Gui's imperial tours should be considered as bona fide "tours of inspection" (*xunshou* 巡狩), as Wechsler has discussed in detail in his study of Tang state ritual, or whether they are strictly records of Tuoba Gui's effort to consolidate his territory during this early period of his rulership, is difficult to determine definitively.²⁰

Another significant event recorded as occurring in Taizu's first reign period, Dengguo, is narrated in the "Treatise on Auspicious and Inauspicious Influences" ("Lingzheng zhi" 靈徵志),²¹ and concerns Tuoba Gui's capture of a very unique one-

¹⁹ *Wei shu* 2.22; 23; 25; 26.

²⁰ Wechsler explicates the origins and history of such tours in *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 161–169.

²¹ The "Lingzheng zhi" (*Wei shu* 112) is divided into two separate parts, *shang* and *xia*. The latter section (*xia*) treats auspicious events, predominantly the appearances and/or tribute offerings of symbolic animals (in order of appearance in the treatise: the spirit-animal (*shenshou*); female unicorn (*qin*); turtle (*gui*); large elephant (*juxiang*); foxes (*hu*); five-colored dog (*wuse gou*); white deer; one-antlered deer; one-horned animal; white wolf; white roebuck; three-legged and four-legged birds; white birds; red birds; teal birds; white cuckoos; glowing in the sky or clouds; sweet dew; auspicious grain; white and black rabbits; white swallow; white sparrow; red sparrow; strange people, strange dreams; jades; metals/gold; trees; white pheasants; springs; the growing together/intertwining of tree branches 木連理, etc.). See chapter 2 for my discussion of the appearance of the spirit-animal.

antlered deer during a hunting expedition in the year 391 C.E. Throughout the treatise, deer (especially white deer) are considered highly auspicious signs, but in this instance the ramifications of the deer's appearance are particularly noteworthy. Tuoba Gui's ministers, when consulted about the meaning of such an unusual animal, interpret the event as being of great import to Tuoba Gui's future and the young Wei state. They remark, "deer should have two antlers, but [this one] now has one: it is a sign that all the states shall be united" (鹿當二角，今一，是諸國將并之應也).²² The "Lingzheng zhi," which purports to provide a comprehensive accounting of both auspicious and inauspicious occurrences throughout the Northern Wei (and into the Eastern Wei), records only two other instances of a one-antlered deer's appearance, which indicates the rarity of such an animal in the historiography, if not perhaps in historical fact.

The "Lingzheng zhi" contains another anecdote set in the Dengguo reign period (this time in the inauspicious influences section)²³ that allegorizes the series of military contestations between Tuoba Gui and one of his rivals, the leader of the Xiongnu Tiefu tribe, Liu Weichen 劉衛辰. The anecdote follows in full:

太祖登國中，河南有虎七，臥於河側，三月乃去。後一年，蚘蟊、白鹿盡渡河北。後一年，河水赤如血。此衛辰滅亡之應。及誅其族類，悉投之河中，其地遂空。

During the Dengguo reign period of Taizu, (386–396), south of the [Yellow] river there were seven tigers, lying at the side of the river, who left after three months.

²² *Wei shu* 112b.2931.

²³ The former (*shang*) part of the "Lingzheng zhi" includes occurrences of inauspicious signs, such as earthquakes, landslides, great winds, floods, frosts, thunder (especially that without clouds), lightning (especially unseasonal lightning), fog (of different hues), fires, anomalies of different colors, strange medical conditions, miasmas, and other unusual events. Then follows a listing of disasters caused by various animals, including locusts, boring insects, and other pest infestations and finally a record of the capture of rats and larger inauspicious animals.

After one year, *pifu* (a type of large ant) and white deer all crossed the river northward. After another year, the waters of the [Yellow] river turned crimson like blood. It was a sign of the annihilation of [Liu] Wei Chen. His *zulei* were executed, and cast into the [Yellow] river, and the land was then cleared.²⁴

Though it is a more complicated portent than the previous example, I interpret this anecdote as presaging Tuoba Gui's conquest of the territory that had been controlled by the Xiongnu Tiefu, which lay in the Ordos region, south and southwest of the Yellow River. The tigers are stand-ins for the military threat originating on the southern side of the Yellow river (i.e., the Tiefu), and the insects and deer are understood as being flushed out of the dangerous Tiefu territory, and fleeing for the protection of Tuoba land. Tuoba Gui, after leading a punitive expedition into Xiongnu Tiefu territory, effectively captures the former Tiefu land and thereby extends Tuoba power south of the Yellow river.²⁵

Accession as Emperor

In 398 C.E., Tuoba Gui acceded to the position of emperor (*huangdi* 皇帝), according to the *Wei shu*, thereby becoming the first Tuoba leader to claim such a title. Not long prior to his accession, Tuoba Gui expresses his acceptance of the mandate of heaven and signals his intent to become emperor in a lengthy speech preserved in the

²⁴ *Wei shu* 112a.2923. Liu Weichen, leader of the Xiongnu Tiefu, attacked the Tuoba in 391 C.E. (unsuccessfully). Tuoba Gui then crossed the Yellow river to attack the Tiefu capital Yueba on a punitive mission, and Liu Weichen was ultimately killed by his own underlings after the Tiefu were forced from their territory. Tuoba Gui then claimed the former Tiefu territory and massacred Liu Weichen's entire clan. It is noteworthy that this anecdote is found in the category of 毛蟲之孽, which contains a heading that means the transformation of ordinary things into strange things (變常而為異). The "Lingzheng zhi" does not contain a section that specifically treats appearances by tigers.

²⁵ For two straightforward accounts of Tuoba Gui's advances against surrounding tribes, see Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900*, 68–72, and Klein, "The Contributions of the Fourth Century Xianbei States to the Reunification of the Chinese Empire," 51–59.

“Ritual Treatise,” which I excerpt in full as follows:

祝曰：「皇帝臣珪敢用玄牡，昭告于皇天后土之靈。上天降命，乃眷我祖宗世王幽都。珪以不德，纂戎前緒，思寧黎元，龔行天罰。殪劉顯，屠衛辰，平慕容，定中夏。羣下勸進，調宜正位居尊，以副天人之望。珪以天時人謀，不可久替，謹命禮官，擇吉日受皇帝璽綬。惟神祇其丕祚於魏室，永綏四方。」²⁶

The invocation was spoken: “I, [Tuoba] Gui, the emperor, dare to use the dark bull and clearly announce [this] to the spirits of heaven and earth. The mandate was sent down by high heaven, and protected our ancestors through generations as they ruled Youdu. Although I am not virtuous, I have inherited that which has been passed down to me, and my thoughts are to bring peace to the commoners. I have reverently carried out punishment in accordance with heaven. [I have] killed Liu Xian, slaughtered [Liu] Wei Chen, pacified the Murong, and settled the central Xia lands. The people exhorted [me] to advance, and spoke that it was appropriate to take the position of respect, in order to assent to the wishes of heaven and man. I, [Tuoba] Gui, have planned in accordance with the heaven’s timeliness; it cannot be deferred for long, thus I reverently order the officials of ritual to select an auspicious day on which to accept the seals and ribbons (insignia) of emperor. May the deities of heaven and earth [bestow] their great blessing upon the court of Wei, and forever pacify the four directions.”

The rhetoric of Tuoba Gui’s recorded speech as he accepts the heavenly mandate to become emperor implies that the Tuoba lineage has always been privileged by the will of heaven, ever since its emergence in Youdu. Tuoba Gui is represented as merely acknowledging his ineluctable destiny, and doing so with the most canonical ritual language.²⁷

The narrative of Tuoba Gui’s accession as emperor is chronicled in greater detail in the *Wei shu* annals. The accession entails several preliminary procedures over a period

²⁶ *Wei shu* 108a.2734.

²⁷ The opening line of Tuoba Gui’s invocation to heaven cites the “Tanggao” 湯誥 chapter of *Shangshu*: [湯] 敢用玄牡，敢昭告于上天神后，請罪有夏。 *Shang shu zheng yi*, 238. The phrase 龔行天罰 also appears in earlier historiography, such as *Shi ji* and *Han shu*.

of many months, each of which is described in some depth. The first undertaking is the deliberation on the naming of the (new) state. Though Tuoba Gui had previously named himself king of Wei (魏王), as mentioned above, the debate on the adoption of the new dynastic designation does not appear until this point in the annals. In the sixth month of 398 C.E., Tuoba Gui issues an edict calling for his officers (*yousi* 有司) to submit their recommendations for the dynastic name (*guohao* 國號). Tuoba Gui's ministers argue in favor of retaining the older name Dai, with the rationale that it would more appropriately reflect the continuous succession of (Tuoba) rulers within the territories that had long been known as Yun and Dai, and would thus conform to the more ancient (pre-Zhou) practice of the coterminous designation of state and family (有國有家), even if the new state were to go on and conquer *tianxia*. As they write, “the *guojia* has come down through the myriad ages, having arisen from the foundation of Yun and Dai; and if the (Tuoba) state is to attain longevity, its name should be Dai” (今國家萬世相承，啟基雲代。若取長遠，應以代為號。²⁸ In essence, their rhetoric centers on the idea that the dynasty is rooted in its original territory, established through the continuous lineage of rulers through many ages. Implicit in their argument is a critique of the divorce of the state (國) from the family (家) since the Han, as well as the subsequent detachment of rulers from their territory. During the post-Han period, they remark, rulers “had risen up

²⁸ *Wei shu* 2.33. The complete text of the ministers' memorial reads: 昔周秦以前，世居所生之土，有國有家，及王天下，即承為號。自漢以來，罷侯置守，時無世繼，其應運而起者，皆不由尺土之資。今國家萬世相承，啟基雲代。臣等以為若取長遠，應以代為號。

according to the exigencies of the times, and not through the endowments of the lands over which they ruled.”²⁹

In response, Tuoba Gui issues an edict countering that the early Tuoba state of Dai had control over only a very distant, marginal territory, whose rulers took the title of king but never exercised sovereignty over lands outside their borders—most critically, over the nine provinces (九州) and the central states to the south. Tuoba Gui’s argument posits that in order to project its rule throughout all *tianxia*, the Tuoba state demands a different, more universal name: one that will go beyond the limitations of the early name Dai. The edict follows:

詔曰：「昔朕遠祖，總御幽都，控制遐國，雖踐王位，未定九州。逮于朕躬，處百代之季，天下分裂，諸華乏主。民俗雖殊，撫之在德，故躬率六軍，掃平中土，凶逆蕩除，遐邇率服。宜仍先號，以為魏焉。布告天下，咸知朕意。」³⁰

The edict said: “In antiquity my distant ancestors commanded Youdu, controlling a remote state, and though they ascended to the throne of king, they had not yet pacified the nine provinces. Coming down to my time, passing through the seasons of a hundred ages, *tianxia* has become fragmented, and the various Hua (states) lack a master. Though the people’s customs are different, they nevertheless [may be] nurtured with virtuous power. Therefore I have led the six armies and quelled the central lands. The evil and disloyal have been annihilated, and [those] far and near have been brought to submission. It is [thus] appropriate to keep the first name, which is that of Wei. Disseminate this throughout *tianxia*, so that all may know my intent.”

Tuoba Gui’s stated intent to unite *tianxia* under the power of the new Wei dynasty is more appropriately understood as aspirational, an assertion of his imperial ambitions, rather than a *fait accompli*. Tuoba Gui seems quite cognizant of the importance of state-

²⁹ *Wei shu* 2.33.

³⁰ *Wei shu* 2.32–33.

name pedigree, as well as the importance of name recognition by those beyond the borders of the old Dai lands.

The critical word in Tuoba Gui's edict is “xian” (of xianhao 先號), which presents a high degree of ambiguity. In its simplest sense, “xianhao” could merely refer to the fact that Tuoba Gui had previously changed his title to king of Wei from king of Dai, a full twelve years earlier (in 386 C.E.). The meaning would therefore be that the first new dynastic name he had proclaimed should be retained. Another strong possibility is that the new dynasty name is meant to invoke the “original” Wei dynasty from the Warring States era. In contrast to other dynasties founded during the Sixteen Kingdoms period, however, the territory controlled by the Tuoba state at the time of Tuoba Gui's edict does not map onto any of the Warring States' territory, laying far to the north of the Great Wall. As is well known, the practice of naming newly founded dynasties with prestigiously archaic-sounding names deriving from the Warring States era had flourished during the Sixteen Kingdoms period, with various Zhaos, Qins, Yans, Xias, etc. sprouting up all across the land. Indeed, by the time Tuoba Gui changed his title to king of Wei in 386 C.E., one other short-lived Wei dynasty had already existed.³¹

In instituting the new dynastic name, Tuoba Gui had apparently taken the advice of his most prominent advisor, Cui Hong 崔宏, who had advocated the name change, arguing that the Wei could follow the ancient precedent of Yin–Shang. Though Dai was an old nation, its receipt of the mandate to rule renewed it (雖曰舊邦，受命惟新，是以

³¹ The earlier Wei dynasty was Ran Wei 冉魏 (350–352 C.E.), founded by Ran Min (冉閔). Another Wei dynasty, Zhai Wei 翟魏 (388–392 C.E.), would be founded two years after Tuoba Gui declared his [Northern] Wei state. Neither of these two minor states is traditionally counted among the Sixteen Kingdoms.

登國之初，改代曰魏)，³² Cui Hong is recorded as pointing out. Moreover, Murong Yong 慕容永, the last emperor of the Western Yan, had consecrated the land as Weitu 魏土. Cui Hong then synthesizes the foregoing lines of thought to conclude that the great name of Wei will be advantageously perceived as a sign from heaven of the Tuoba mandate to rule.³³

After the affirmation of Wei as the new, imperial state name in 398 C.E., the annals provide a record of Tuoba Gui's next moves as he prepares to become emperor.³⁴ In the seventh month, according to the annals, a new capital is established at Pingcheng 平城, construction work begins on the palace, the ancestral temple (*zongmiao* 宗廟) is built, and the *sheji* (社稷) altars are erected.³⁵ In the eighth month, Tuoba Gui issues an edict directing the demarcation of the imperial domain (封畿) and the suburban domain (郊甸), as well as the laying out and standardization of roads. He orders the official setting of weights and measures, and dispatches envoys on an inspection (and policing)

³² Allusion to *Shi jing* “Wen wang” (no. 235): “The Zhou is an old nation, but its mandate is new” (周雖舊邦，其命維新). *Shi jing zheng yi*, 1114–1131.

³³ *Wei shu* 24.620–621. The full text of Cui's memorial reads as follows: 三皇五帝之立號也，或因所生之土，或即封國之名。故虞夏商周始皆諸侯，及聖德既隆，萬國宗戴，稱號隨本，不復更立。唯商人屢徙，改號曰殷，然猶兼行，不廢始基之稱。故詩云『殷商之旅』，又云『天命玄鳥，降而生商，宅殷土茫茫』。此其義也。昔漢高祖以漢王定三秦，滅強楚，故遂以漢為號。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。又慕容永亦奉進魏土。夫『魏』者大名，神州之上國，斯乃革命之徵驗，利見之玄符也。臣愚以為宜號為魏。

³⁴ The “Ritual Treatise” contains a highly condensed version of events for 398 C.E. (the first year of the Tianxing reign), in which the capital was laid at Pingcheng, Tuoba Gui acceded to the position of emperor, and “erected the *tanzhao*-altars to commune/communicate with and worship heaven and earth.” (*Wei shu* 108a.2734: 天興元年，定都平城，即皇帝位，立壇兆告祭天地。)

³⁵ *Wei shu* 2.33: 秋七月，遷都平城，始營宮室，建宗廟，立社稷。

tour of the *jun* and *guo* within his jurisdiction.³⁶ Many of these actions would have served a very practical and utilitarian purpose, but more importantly, they signify the laying of the groundwork for a new imperial regime. Moreover, the sequence of these actions inscribes a spatial displacement, originating at the symbolic center of the state—the capital, encompassing the palace, ancestral temple, and the altars to grain and soil—outward through the imperial domain, then outward still through the suburban domain, and finally to the most remote areas of the state’s territory, the subordinate *jun* (commanderies) and *guo* (states). The listing of this series of seemingly mundane administrative acts reenacts a kind of radiating imperial power, from the center to the farthest reaches of the territory.

In the realm of ritual too, Tuoba Gui undertakes a requisite set of acts that attend the establishment of a new dynasty. In the eleventh month, he commands the institutionalization of officials and ranks, the setting of the pitch-pipes, and the harmonization of the musical tones.³⁷ The ceremonies for the suburban temples, the *sheji*-altars, banquets, and royal audiences are selected, the penal codes (*lüling* 律令) and

³⁶ *Wei shu* 2.33: 八月，詔有司正封畿，制郊甸，端徑術，標道里，平五權，較五量，定五度。遣使循行郡國，舉奏守宰不法者，親覽察黜陟之。

³⁷ In addition to the annals passage cited above, the *Wei shu* “Treatise on Music” (“Yue zhi” 樂志) also narrates the Taizu’s institutionalization of musical standards as well as the ritual performance of music and dance in 398 C.E. See *Wei shu* 109.2827: 天興元年冬，詔尚書吏部郎鄧淵定律呂，協音樂。及追尊皇曾祖、皇祖、皇考諸帝，樂用八佾，舞皇始之舞。皇始舞，太祖所作也，以明開大始祖之業。後更制宗廟。皇帝入廟門，奏王夏，太祝迎神于廟門，奏迎神曲，猶古降神之樂；乾豆上，奏登歌，猶古清廟之樂；曲終，下奏神祚，嘉神明之饗也；皇帝行禮七廟，奏陞步，以為行止之節；皇帝出門，奏總章，次奏八佾舞，次奏送神曲。

prohibitions (*kejin* 科禁) are implemented, and the *taishiling* (the official charged with astronomy and calendars) makes the armillary sphere for astronomical observation.³⁸

After the completion of all the preliminary steps, Tuoba Gui accepts the imperial insignia (the seal and ribbons) in the twelfth month of 398 C.E. in the Tianwen hall (Tianwen *dian* 天文殿), which had been built two months earlier, presumably for this purpose. A general amnesty is declared, and a new reign period (Tianxing 天興) proclaimed. The scene of Tuoba Gui's accession is vividly described in the annals:

十有二月己丑，帝臨天文殿，太尉、司徒進璽綬，百官咸稱萬歲。大赦，改年。追尊成帝已下及后號諡。樂用皇始之舞。³⁹

In the twelfth month, on the *jichou* day, the emperor approached the Tianwen temple, the *taiwei* and *situ* presented the imperial seals and ribbons, and the hundred officials all spoke *wansui*. A general amnesty [was proclaimed], and a new reign period [declared]. Posthumous temple names were bestowed on previous emperors from Emperor [Zhao-] Cheng down.⁴⁰ For music, the “Huangshi” dance [was] used.

After enacting the amnesty and new reign title, and honoring the past Tuoba ruling lineage with temple names (which I discuss in more detail below), the newly installed Emperor Daowu then focuses on another essential procedure for the inauguration of the new imperial state: the designation of the element through which the dynasty would rule.

³⁸ *Wei shu* 2.33: 十有一月辛亥，詔尚書吏部郎中鄧淵典官制，立爵品，定律呂，協音樂；儀曹郎中董謐撰郊廟、社稷、朝覲、饗宴之儀；三公郎中王德定律令，申科禁；太史令晁崇造渾儀，考天象；吏部尚書崔玄伯總而裁之。The armillary sphere, also known as a spherical astrolabe, is an instrument for celestial observation, that, as it was primarily used for calendrical calculations, would have been considered a required piece of equipment for a new imperial dynasty.

³⁹ *Wei shu* 2.34.

⁴⁰ As detailed in chapter 2, the imperial temple names for each of the Tuoba Gui's predecessors are recorded as bestowed in this first year of the Wei imperial state.

Descriptions of the formulations within the five elements/five phases schema are found in both the annals and the “Ritual Treatise.” The passage from the annals follows:

詔百司議定行次，尚書崔玄伯等奏從土德，服色尚黃，數用五，未祖辰臘，犧牲用白，五郊立氣，宣贊時令，敬授民時，行夏之正。⁴¹

[The emperor] issued an edict to the hundred officers to offer recommendations on establishing the ranks. The *shangshu* Cui Xuanbo (Cui Hong) et al. memorialized [in favor of] following the virtue of earth, therefore yellow would be used for the color of dress, five would be used for the number, *wei zu chen la*,⁴² white would be used for sacrifices.

In the five suburbs establish the *qi*, promulgate the seasonal ordinances, disseminate the instruction for agricultural activities, and implement the standard of the Xia.

For the purpose of comparison, I also excerpt the passage from the “Ritual Treatise”:

詔有司定行次，正服色。羣臣奏以國家繼黃帝之後，宜為土德，故神獸如牛，牛土畜，又黃星顯曜，其符也。於是始從土德，數用五，服尚黃，犧牲用白。⁴³

[The emperor] issued an edict to the officers to establish the ranks and to standardize the colors for dress. The officials all memorialized [in favor of] the state succeeding in the lineage of the Yellow Thearch (Huangdi), and that it would therefore be appropriate to rule through the virtue of earth, that the divine animal should be the ox, as the ox is an animal of the earth, and the yellow star shone brightly, as an [auspicious] sign. Since the foundation would be the virtue of earth, the number would therefore be five, the garments would be yellow, and the sacrificial color would be white.

⁴¹ *Wei shu* 2.34.

⁴² The phrase “wei zu chen la” (未祖辰臘) refers to the mode of ancestor worship that corresponds to ruling through the element of earth and the Yellow Thearch (Huangdi).

⁴³ *Wei shu* 108a.2734.

In terms of their descriptions of the implementation of the element that would form the foundation of the new imperial regime, as well as the corresponding number, color, animal, etc., the two passages are in perfect accord. However, the two descriptions diverge on a crucial point: the account in the annals institutionalizes the “standard of the Xia” (夏之正), but, as I will discuss at some length later, the account in the “Ritual Treatise” contains no such language, and instead includes a very specific and significant imperial ritual prescription regarding the worship of heaven, one that invokes the “Zhou model” (周典).

Ritual Practice in the New Imperial State of Wei

The “Ritual Treatise” elaborates the institutionalization and first imperial ritual held at the *sheji* (社稷) altars, recorded for the year after Taizu, Emperor Daowu’s accession (399 C.E.), in a passage embedded within a longer description of the establishment of the ancestral temple (*zongmiao* 宗廟). The passage pertaining specifically to the *sheji*-altars follows:

置太社、太稷、帝社於宗廟之右，為方壇四陛。祀以二月、八月，用戊，皆太牢。句龍配社，周棄配稷，皆有司侍祀。⁴⁴

[The emperor] set up the great *she*-altar and the great *ji*-altar. The emperor [sacrificed to the] *she*-altar to the right of the ancestral temple, which was a square *tan*-altar with four steps. The *si*-sacrifice was held in the second month and the eighth month, on the *mao* day, each time using a great bull. Julong accompanied the [sacrifice at the] *she*, Zhouqi accompanied the [sacrifice at the] *ji*, with all the officers as attendants to the *si*-sacrifice.

⁴⁴ *Wei shu* 108a.2735.

Next, and also recorded for the year 399 C.E., come the construction and dedication of the ancestral temple (*zongmiao* 宗廟), and the installation in the temple of tablets for each of the past five Tuoba rulers, from the Shizu Emperor Shenyuan 神元 (Tuoba Liwei 力微) through Emperor Xianming 獻明 (Tuoba Shi 寔), the father of Tuoba Gui. The complete passage from the “Ritual Treatise” follows:

冬十月，平文、昭成、獻明廟成。歲五祭，用二至、二分、臘，牲用太牢，常遣宗正兼太尉率祀官侍祀。

...

立祖神，常以正月上未，設藉於端門內，祭牲用羊、豕、犬各一。又立神元、思帝、平文、昭成、獻明五帝廟於宮中，歲四祭，用正、冬、臘、九月，牲用馬、牛各一，太祖親祀宮中。

立星神，一歲一祭，常以十二月，用馬薦各一⁴⁵，牛豕各二，雞一。⁴⁶

In the winter, in the tenth month, the temple to [Emperors] Pingwen, Zhaocheng, and Xianming was completed. Each year, five *ji*-sacrifices [would be held]: at the two solstices, the two equinoxes, and the *la*-day (the last day of the year), with a great bull used for the sacrificial animal and the *qianzongzheng* and the *taiwei shuaisiguan* attending the *si*-sacrifice.

The installation of the lineage deities was always [held] on the *shangmo*-day of the first month, and the *ji* were set up within the even door. The *ji*-sacrifices used a sheep, pig, and dog for each [ancestor]. Another temple was installed in the palace, [dedicated] to the five emperors Shenyuan, Si, Pingwen, Zhaocheng, and Xianming. Each year, four *ji*-sacrifices [would be held]: in the *zheng* (first month), *dong* (winter month), *la* (last month), and the ninth month, with a horse and a cow used for the sacrificial animals. Taizu personally performed the *si*-sacrifice in the palace.

⁴⁵ Curiously, as pointed out by editors of the modern Zhonghua shuju edition of *Wei shu*, the *Cefu Yuangui* preserves an alternate character for *jian*: *lu*, deer. (The use of a deer as a sacrificial animal would be very unorthodox.) See *Wei shu* 2753n3: 冊府同上卷頁「薦」作「鹿」。按既云「各一」，應是二物，疑作「鹿」是，但他處不見祭祀用鹿，今不改。

⁴⁶ *Wei shu* 108a.2735.

The *xingshen* (star-deities) were also installed, and each year one *ji*-sacrifice [would be held], always in the twelfth month, with a horse and a deer⁴⁷ for each, and two cows and two pigs, and one chicken.

As I clarified in chapter 2, none among the succession of past rulers in Tuoba Gui's ancestry truly qualified as emperors, and according to the prefatory annals of the *Wei shu*, each was only enshrined in the imperial lineage by Tuoba Gui himself, on his accession as emperor in the new imperial state of Wei. As the founding of the new imperial state required the dedication of an ancestral temple and the installation of the royal ancestors, the five figures (the Shizu Emperor Shenyuan 始祖神元帝; Emperor Si 思帝; Emperor Pingwen 平文帝; Emperor Zhaocheng 昭成帝; and Emperor Xianming 獻明帝) were elevated to the status of emperor, through this account in the *Wei shu* "Ritual Treatise." Intriguingly, as I have discussed in chapter 2, Tuoba Gui's accounting of the preceding five emperors omits Shamohan, the heir apparent, but does include his own father, Tuoba Shi, who never actually ruled, as Tuoba Gui directly succeeded his grandfather, Shiyijian.

Another passage from the "Ritual Treatise" that treats the installation of the previous five royal ancestors at the start of Emperor Daowu's reign includes a specific description of the dedication to Tuoba Gui's father, Emperor Xianming, and the earlier former "emperors" of sites for ritual worship:

又立王神四，歲二祭，常以八月、十月，各用羊一。又置獻明以上所立天神四十所，歲二祭，亦以八月、十月。神尊者以馬，次以牛，小以羊，皆女巫行事。

又於雲中及盛樂神元舊都祀神元以下七帝，歲三祭，正、冬、臘，用馬牛各一，祀官侍祀。⁴⁸

⁴⁷ As noted above, the character *jian* (deer) is likely a mistake. By syntax, the character should refer to another sacrificial animal.

The four royal deities were also established, and each year the *ji*-sacrifice [was performed to them] twice, always in the eighth and tenth months, with a sheep for each. Also installed sites for [Emperor] Xianming and [those emperors above him], and established forty sites for the heavenly deities, and each year two *ji*-sacrifices [were performed to them], also in the eighth and tenth months. Among the deities, for the (most) venerable ones, [the sacrifices] use a horse, for [those at the] secondary level use a cow, and for [those at the] lowest level use a sheep, with all sacrifices carried out by the female shamans.

Also, for the seven emperors from Shenyuan down, the *si*-sacrifice [would be held] at Shenyuan's old capitals of Yunzhong and Shengle; and each year three *ji*-sacrifices on the *zheng* (first month), *dong* (winter month), and *la* (last month) [would be held], using one horse and one cow, with the *si*-sacrifice official as attendant.

Interestingly, this account emphasizes that sacrifices for all of the previous seven “emperors”⁴⁹ shall be performed at the old Dai capitals of Yunzhong and Shengle, as a way of honoring the imperial ancestors in their original land. These sites would have been located outside the area of the new capital. Absent from this second account is any mention of the ancestral temple in the new, imperial Northern Wei capital of Pingcheng.

Among the emperor's acts associated with the founding of the new Wei imperial state was also the establishment of the agricultural ritual, the plowing of the sacred field (*gengjie* 耕籍 or *gengji* 耕藉). The following entry is preserved in the “Ritual Treatise” for the second year of Emperor Daowu's reign, or 399 C.E.:

明年春，帝始躬耕籍田，祭先農，用羊一。祀日於東郊，用騂牛一。

⁴⁸ *Wei shu* 108a.2735–2736.

⁴⁹ Although Tuoba Gui's imperial lineage actually includes a total of six ancestors (one for each generation) from Tuoba Liwei (Emperor Shenyuan) through Tuoba Shi (Emperor Xianming), only either five or seven ancestors may be honored in the ancestral temple of the state, according to ritual texts. In order to count seven “emperors” from Shenyuan, then, it is necessary to include a lateral co-ruler, and either Tuoba Yiyi (Emperor Huan) or Tuoba Yilu (Emperor Mu) would qualify.

秋分祭月於西郊，用白羊一。⁵⁰

In the following year, in spring, the emperor (Daowu) personally commenced the performance of the field-plowing ceremony, and *ji*-sacrificed to the first cultivator [Shennong], using a sheep. [He performed the] *si*-sacrifice to the sun at the eastern suburbs, using a reddish cow. At the autumn equinox, [he performed the] *ji*-sacrifice to the moon in the western suburbs, using a white sheep.

This ritual, which was standardized in the Han, entailed the cultivation of land for the planting of the grain that would be used in sacrifices. As Bodde has discussed, the Han emperors personally performed this rite twelve times in total, and it was generally associated with the eastern direction, as it is in this instance, and was reportedly performed in the first months of spring.⁵¹ A second instance of the sacrifice to the sun and attendant agricultural ritual is recorded for the year 400 C.E. (the third year of the Tianxing reign period), performed this time not by the emperor himself, but by the officers. On that occasion, the officers were ordered to carry out the sacrifice at the eastern suburbs, in conjunction with commencing the ritual plowing (二月丁亥，詔有司祀日于東郊。始耕籍田).⁵²

Suburban Sacrifices and Heaven Worship

In the preceding discussion of Tuoba Gui's accession to emperor and the establishment of ritual protocol for the new, imperial state of Wei, I briefly mentioned that there is one critical difference between the accounts of this event in the annals and in

⁵⁰ *Wei shu* 108a.2735–2736.

⁵¹ See the discussion in Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China*, chapter 9, especially pp. 223–229.

⁵² *Wei shu* 2.36. Throughout the Northern Wei rule, the plowing rite was performed during the reign of only one other emperor, Emperor Xiaozong, who is recorded as having personally performed the ritual. See *Wei shu* 9.233.

the “Ritual Treatise.” The passage in the “Ritual Treatise” contains an additional ritual prescription that is absent from the annals version. That portion of the text concerns the imperial suburban sacrifices entailed in the worship of heaven, and reads as follows:

祀天之禮用周典，以夏四月親祀于西郊，徽幟有加焉。⁵³

For the rite of heaven worship (*sitian*), the Zhou model shall be used; in the summer, in the fourth month, [the emperor] shall personally perform the *si*-sacrifice at the western suburb, and the banners there shall therefore be increased.⁵⁴

Of course, the suburban sacrifices have a long and complicated genealogy, and in the following section I examine evidence from Zhou ritual texts in order to evaluate this purported articulation of Zhou imperial sacrifice. Through an analysis of these texts, it becomes clear that this *Wei shu* interpretation of Zhou ritual precedent is strikingly inaccurate.

In the *Shi ji* treatise on the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices (the “Feng shan shu” 封禪書), in which Sima Qian summarizes the history of imperial sacrifices, the following citation from the *Zhou guan* is excerpted:

周官曰，冬日至，祀天於南郊，迎長日之至；夏日至，祭地祇。皆用樂舞，而神乃可得而禮也。⁵⁵

⁵³ *Wei shu* 108.1.2734.

⁵⁴ A slight ambiguity persists in these lines, as I am unable to definitively eliminate the possibility that the meaning is more like: the Zhou model shall be used for the rites themselves, but not necessarily for the prescriptions of when, where, and how the sacrifice should be performed. Also, recall that while not yet an emperor, Tuoba Gui twice previously (in 386 and 391 C.E.) worshiped heaven, presumably at the western suburbs on both occasions, as discussed in the preceding section.

⁵⁵ *Shi ji* 28.1357. Translated by Michael Puett in his *To Become a God*, 302.

The *Zhou guan* says: “When the winter solstice arrives, sacrifice to heaven at the southern suburb to welcome the coming of the longer day. When the summer solstice arrives, sacrifice to the spirits of earth. At both use music and dancing, and the spirits can thereby be obtained and brought into ritual.”

The apparent source of this quotation appears in the received text of the *Zhou li*, within a passage specifying the appropriate music and dance for the various imperial rites. The relevant lines follow:

冬日至，於地上之圜丘奏之，若樂六變，則天神皆降，可得而禮矣。

...

夏日至，於澤中之方丘奏之，若樂八變，則地示皆出，可得而禮矣。⁵⁶

When the winter solstice arrives, perform the music at the round altar in the earth; if the music [contains] the six transformations, then the spirits of heaven will all descend, and [one] can obtain them and bring them into ritual.

...

When the summer solstice arrives, perform the music at the square altar in the pool; if the music [contains] the eight transformations, then the spirits of earth will all emerge, and [one] can obtain them and bring them into ritual.

The passages excerpted above not only establish the ritual protocol for the summer and winter solstice rites, but also explicate the purposes of such rites: to obtain the spirits of heaven and earth. The *Zhou li* passage stipulates which altars are ritually correct for the performance of these seasonal rites, but it does not mention the suburban sacrifice per se; that directional detail is supplied by the *Shi ji* passage.

⁵⁶ *Zhou li zheng yi*, 689–695. (The passage appears in the “Chunguan zongbo” (春官宗伯) section, the title of which is interpreted by Boltz as “Spring offices; [domain of the] patriarch of ancestral affairs” in *Early Chinese Texts*, 24.)

The *Li ji* also includes a description of the suburban sacrifice, in the “Jiao te sheng” (郊特牲) chapter:

郊之祭也，迎長日之至也，大報天而主日也。兆於南郊，就陽位也。⁵⁷

At the suburban sacrifice, [the son of Heaven] would welcome the coming of the longer day. It was [an act] of great *bao* (recompense) to heaven, and focused on the sun. The worship-place was at the southern suburb, the position of *yang*.⁵⁸

Although this passage does not explicitly refer to the prescribed date for the performance of the sacrifice, I interpret it to refer to the rites on the winter solstice, because the phrase used here, “to welcome the coming of the longer day,” appears verbatim in the passages from the *Zhou li* and *Shi ji* cited above. This *Li ji* passage, then, presents one of the earliest textual references to the practice of the imperial suburban sacrifices, and specifically lays out that the worship of heaven should be performed by the emperor at the time of the winter solstice at the southern suburb.

In light of the prescriptions found in these earlier texts, from the *Li ji* and the *Zhou li* to the *Shi ji* (paraphrasing the *Zhou guan*), it is clear that the *Wei shu* ritual instruction for the worship of heaven—at the western suburb, in the summer, at the fourth month—does not adhere to the past articulations of this imperial sacrifice, despite its attested modeling on the Zhou nor, as I will demonstrate in the ensuing section, did it

⁵⁷ *Li ji zheng yi*, 926–927.

⁵⁸ Cf. translation by Legge, “At the (Great) border sacrifice, he welcomed the arrival of the longest day. It was a great act of thanksgiving to Heaven, and the sun was the chief object considered in it. The space marked off for it was in the southern suburb—the place most open to the brightness and warmth (of the heavenly influence).” Note that Legge (incorrectly, in my view) interprets the phrase 迎長日之至 as referring to the summer solstice.

conform to the precedent of Han practice. The *Wei shu* formulation for the worship of heaven is both in the wrong season and at the wrong location.

帝王之事莫大乎承天之序，承天之序莫重於郊祀，故聖王盡心極慮以建其制。祭天於南郊，就陽之義也；瘞地於北郊，即陰之象也。

In the affairs of emperors and kings, none is greater than supporting the order of heaven. In supporting the order of heaven, nothing is more important than sacrifices and offerings. Therefore, sage-kings devoted their hearts and trained their thoughts to the fullest to establish their regulations. They sacrificed to heaven in the southern suburb, in accordance with the propriety of yang. They offered to earth in the northern suburb, in accordance with the image of yin.⁵⁹

The excerpt above is taken from a memorial submitted by two ministers in the reign of Han Emperor Cheng (33–7 B.C.E.), a memorial that opened a court debate on the whole imperial ritual system. Advocating a restoration of the Zhou ritual practices of antiquity, these and other ministers effectively persuaded the emperor to abolish the cultic system practiced in the reign of Emperor Wu (portions of which had first been instituted by the imperial state of Qin) and inaugurate the more orthodox imperial sacrifices allegedly devised by the Zhou.⁶⁰ The suburban sacrifices to heaven and earth were consequently inaugurated by Emperor Cheng, and the full array of purported Zhou rituals would be adopted under the rule of Emperor Ping at the close of the first century B.C.E.⁶¹

⁵⁹ *Han shu* 25b.1253–54. Translation by Puett in his *To Become a God*, 308.

⁶⁰ See Michael Puett's study of this debate in *To Become a God*, especially pp. 307–315.

⁶¹ For a more general discussion of the suburban sacrifices, see also Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 107–111. Wechsler follows Utsugi Akira in summarizing the general principle of suburban sacrifices during the Han as: worship heaven at the southern suburbs at the winter solstice; and worship earth at the northern suburbs at the summer solstice.

Returning to the topic of Northern Wei imperial sacrifices, the question now becomes: if the Wei were following neither Zhou imperial ritual prescriptions nor Han precedent, what was the origin of their idiosyncratic tradition of heaven worship at the western suburb, held in the summer, in the fourth month? For a possible answer to this question, I turn to Kang Le's scholarship on the history and development of imperial ritual under the Northern Wei. According to Kang, when the Tuoba regime founded its new state, it not only instituted an imported system for imperial rule, but also implemented a complete set of state cultic practice from the central plains ("zhongyuan xitong guojia jidian" 中原系統國家祭典).⁶² Foremost among the sacrifices in this imported ritual system was the worship of heaven at the southern suburb (*nanjiao jitian* 南郊祭天), which, Kang asserts, had become the core imperial ritual in the preceding ethnically Han regimes.

Nevertheless, Kang argued, the ritual of heaven worship at the southern suburb was not nearly as important to the early Tuoba rulers as another set of state rituals, which had originated among north Asian nomadic tribal communities including most notably the Xiongnu, and which the Tuoba themselves had practiced prior to their founding of the imperial state. This alternative set of state rituals valorized a different practice of heaven worship at the western suburb in the fourth month, one that largely persisted throughout Tuoba rule until ritual reforms were initiated by Emperor Xiaowen toward the end of the

⁶² Kang Le, *Cong xijiao dao nanjiao: guojia jidian yu beiwei zhengzhi*, 167. Kang traces the implementation of such ritual practices to the efforts of Cui Hong et al., as their response to Tuoba Gui's directive to his advisors to select rituals for the new state in 398 C.E. (See *Wei shu* 2.33)

fifth century.⁶³ Indeed, acknowledgment of the existence of an older practice of heaven worship by the Tuoba appears in a passage from the “Treatise on Music” (“Yuezhi” 樂志). The passage describes the ritual music and dance for the performance of the “old rites (舊禮),” which specifically refers to the autumnal *si*-sacrifice to heaven at the western suburb, as well as the “affairs” held at the eastern temple in the summer.⁶⁴

While Kang’s argument focuses on these two discrete sets of imperial sacrifices, I will argue, based a careful analysis, that the *Wei shu* narratives depicting the ritual practice of the Northern Wei state involve more than the two codified traditions described above, and occasionally defy identification as being associated with one or the other ritual practice. Kang’s argument is persuasive in explicating the most salient aspects of the two sets of ritual practice, but it does little to account for the many examples in the *Wei shu* that have no clear affiliation.

Early Northern Wei Suburban Sacrifices

The record of imperial sacrifices to heaven and earth during the reign of the Northern Wei founder, Tuoba Gui, Emperor Daowu, or Taizu reveals that such sacrifices were not standardized in this period, nor were they performed in accordance with the

⁶³ See Kang Le, *Cong xijiao dao nanjiao: guojia jidian yu beiwei zhengzhi*, 165–178, for a discussion of Northern Wei state ritual in the early period. See also Kang Le, “An Empire for a City: Cultural Reforms of the Xiaowen Emperor.”

⁶⁴ The full citation from *Wei shu* 109.2827, including the recorded music and dances performed, is as follows: 又舊禮：孟秋祀天西郊，兆內壇西，備列金石，樂具，皇帝入兆內行禮，咸奏舞八佾之舞；孟夏有事于東廟，用樂略與西郊同。 According to this passage, the sacrifices to heaven and (presumably) earth were held in the first months of autumn and summer, or the seventh month and the fourth month, respectively.

prescriptions of the Zhou ritual texts, as codified during the Han. In this period of early imperial Northern Wei rule, which spanned a little over a decade from Tuoba Gui's accession as emperor in 398 C.E. until his death in 409 C.E., the *Wei shu* represents Emperor Daowu's practice as often departing from the explicitly stated Wei ritual protocols; this hints at a tension—or possibly even outright incompatibility—between the two sets of imperial suburban sacrifices.

In this section, through a close reading of *Wei shu* narratives that describe Emperor Daowu's performance of the imperial sacrifices at the suburbs, I analyze the striking contrast between Daowu's rituals, and the iteration and reiteration of “correct” ritual practice that is interspersed among the accounts. As we will see, the continual protestations that the Northern Wei really did practice the orthodox version of the suburban sacrifices—in spite of evidence to the contrary—has the effect of providing a corrective to the *Wei shu* historiography covering the early imperial rule.

In the *Wei shu* “Treatise on Music,” we find a depiction of the scenes as Tuoba Gui performs his first *ji*-sacrifice to heaven and *ji*-sacrifice to the earth deity as emperor, in the first year of his reign (398 C.E.):

太祖初，冬至祭天于南郊圓丘，樂用皇矣，奏雲和之舞，事訖，奏維皇，將燎；夏至祭地祇於北郊方澤，樂用天祚，奏大武之舞。⁶⁵

At the beginning of Taizu's [reign], on the winter solstice [the emperor] performed the *ji*-sacrifice to heaven at the round altar of the southern suburb. The music used was “Huangyi,” and the dance “Yunhe” was performed. After the affair was completed, “Weihuang” was performed, and the burning rites [took place]. At the summer solstice, [the emperor] performed the *ji*-sacrifice to the earth-deity at the square pool in the northern suburb. The music used was “Tianzuo,” and the dance “Dawu” was performed.

⁶⁵ *Wei shu* 109.2827–2828.

Curiously, this is the only record of such rituals by Emperor Daowu in 398 C.E.; neither the “Imperial Annals” nor the “Ritual Treatise” include any mention of these very correct (Han) suburban sacrifices.

Also significant is the passage that follows the section quoted above, in which Emperor Daowu is cast as the host of a great banquet, held to “calibrate the pitches and rectify the music” and featuring performances of the unique tunes of the five surrounding states (五方殊俗之曲) of Yan, Zhao, Qin, and Wu.⁶⁶ The metaphor invoked here of the standardization of musical scales of course represents a symbolic bringing into the fold of neighboring polities. Wu is a stand-in for the ethnically Han southern dynasties, corresponding at this point to the Eastern Jin, and Yan is counted as two *fang*, encompassing the territory of both Murong regimes, Former and Later Yan. According to the “Treatise on Music,” Emperor Daowu came into possession of the ritual musical instruments after pacifying Zhongshan. The “Treatise on Music” also contains a complete historical accounting of how the instruments were inherited throughout the tumultuous period following sacking of Luoyang in 311—quite clearly signifying the transfer of imperial authority.⁶⁷ Though the scenes discussed here from the “Treatise on Music” are perhaps highly idealized, anachronistic portrayals of Emperor Daowu’s early reign as emperor, the existence of such records significantly complicates and problematizes the accounts found in the annals and “Ritual Treatise” sections.

⁶⁶ *Wei shu* 109.2828: 正月上日，饗羣臣，宣布政教，備列宮懸正樂，兼奏燕、趙、秦、吳之音，五方殊俗之曲。四時饗會亦用焉。凡樂者樂其所自生，禮不忘其本，掖庭中歌真人代歌，上叙祖宗開基所由，下及君臣廢興之跡，凡一百五十章，昏晨歌之，時與絲竹合奏。郊廟宴饗亦用之。

⁶⁷ *Wei shu* 109.2827.

According to accounts in both the “Imperial Annals” and the “Ritual Treatise,” Taizu, Emperor Daowu, first performed the suburban sacrifice to the highest deity, Shangdi (上帝), in the second year of his reign (399 C.E., or the second year of the Tianxing reign period), at the location of the southern suburbs. The annals state: “In the second year [of Tianxing] on the *jiazi* day, [the emperor] for the first time [performed] the *si*-sacrifice to Shangdi at the southern suburbs, with the Shizu Emperor Shen Yuan accompanying. [The emperor] descended the *tan*-altar to inspect the burning [rites], and after the ritual was completed, [he] returned” ([天興] 二年春正月甲子，初祠上帝于南郊，以始祖神元皇帝配，降壇視燎，成禮而反。).⁶⁸ The corresponding account in the “Ritual Treatise” contains a far more detailed description of this inaugural ritual, including a full accounting of the panoply of deities to whom sacrifices were offered:

二年正月，帝親祀上帝于南郊，以始祖神元皇帝配。為壇通四陸，為壇埽三重。天位在其上，南面，神元西面。五精帝在壇內，壇內四帝，各於其方，一帝在未。日月五星、二十八宿、天一、太一、北斗、司中、司命、司祿、司民在中壇內，各因其方。其餘從食者合一千餘神，饌在外壇內。藉用藁秸，玉用四珪，幣用束帛，牲用黝犢，器用陶匏。

上帝、神元用犢各一，五方帝共用犢一，日月等共用牛一。祭畢，燎牲體左於壇南巳地，從陽之義。其壅地壇兆，制同南郊。⁶⁹

In the second year [of Tianxing] (399 C.E.), in the first month, the emperor personally performed the *si*-sacrifice to Shangdi at the southern suburb, with the Shizu Emperor Shen Yuan accompanying (*pei*). The altar-platform (*tantong*) had four steps; the altar embankment (*weilie*) had three tiers. The heavenly position was at the top, facing south, and Shen Yuan faced west. The emperors of the five essences were inside the *tan*-altar: four emperors were inside the *wei*-altar, each placed in its [respective] direction, with one emperor at the base. The sun, moon,

⁶⁸ *Wei shu* 2.34.

⁶⁹ *Wei shu* 108a.2734.

five planets, twenty-eight constellations, the *tianyi*, *taiyi*, *beidou*, *sizhong*, *siming*, *silu*, and *simin* were [located] in the center inside the *wei*-altar, each in its [respective] direction. The remaining impersonators altogether numbered more than a thousand deities, and were fed (i.e., sacrificed to) within the outer *wei*-altar.

...

One (sacrificial) calf each was used for Shangdi and Shenyuan; one (sacrificial) calf for the emperors of the five directions altogether; one cow was used for the sun, moon, etc., altogether. After the *ji*-ceremony was completed, the bodies of the burnt sacrifices were laid out on the earth to the south of the *tan*-altar, signifying following the *yang*. They were buried in the earth around the altar, conforming to the regulations of the southern suburb.

The ritual sacrifice to Shangdi merges here with the ancestral worship paid to the founder of the imperial lineage, the Shizu Emperor Shenyuan. The litany of deities to whom sacrifices are offered in this ritual is generally in line with earlier textual prescriptions for imperial sacrifice⁷⁰ and the principles reflected in the ritual, including the association of the southern suburb with *yang* and the performance of the sacrifice to Shangdi (or *tian* 天) at the southern suburb, also conform to such prescriptions. The strikingly unorthodox element is the fact that the sacrifice to Shangdi (or *tian*) is out of season: as discussed above, the ritual is meant to be held at the time of the winter solstice, yet here it is performed in spring, in the first month.

One year later (in 400 C.E., or the third year of Tianxing), in spring, in the first month, the emperor is depicted as performing the suburban sacrifice to heaven, this time at the northern suburb:

明年正月辛酉，郊天。癸亥，瘞地於北郊，以神元竇皇后配。五岳名山在中壠內，四瀆大川於外壠內。后土、神元后，牲共用玄牡一，玉

⁷⁰ See, e.g., the “*Ji fa*” chapter of the *Zhou li*, in *Shi san jing zheng yi*, 1506–1527.

用兩珪，幣用束帛，五岳等用牛一。祭畢，瘞牲體右於壇之北亥地，從陰也。⁷¹

The following year [400 C.E.], in the first month, on the *xinyou* day, [the emperor performed] the suburban sacrifice to heaven (*jiao tian*). On the *guihai* day, [they] buried [the sacrifices] at the northern suburb, with Empress Dou of (emperor) Shenyuan accompanying. The five peaks/famous mountains were installed inside the central *wei*-altar, the four waterways/great rivers were inside the outer *wei*-altar. The Houtu (lord of earth) and the empress of Shenyuan were sacrificed to together using one dark bull; for jades two jade *gui* (pendants) were used; for currency a sheaf of brocade was used, a cow was used for each of the five peaks and other [deities]. After the *ji*-sacrifice was complete, [they] buried the sacrificial corpses to the right of the north of the *tan*-altar in the *hai*-land, following the *yin*.

In this ritual sacrifice to heaven, another imperial Tuoba ancestor, in this instance the consort of the Shizu Emperor Shenyuan, is a participant. As was the case with Emperor Shenyuan in the previous sacrifice, the empress herself becomes an object of sacrifice, together with the lord of earth (Houtu), whose role in Tuoba origin mythology should be remembered. Moreover, in this passage, the five peaks (五岳) and four waterways (四瀆) are also included. Though sacrifices to the five peaks and four waterways were codified parts of the ritual system (which carried through from Zhou to Han), such sacrifices were not meant to be performed by the emperor himself, according to the ritual texts, but rather by his ministers. More significantly, they were meant to be sacrificed to *in situ*, not, as we find here, remotely, from the location of the northern suburb. That the emperor figures as the sacrificer to heaven, the lord of earth (signifying the earliest Tuoba ancestors), the empress of the Shizu Emperor Shenyuan (the earliest ruler in the Tuoba imperial lineage), and each of the five mountains and four waterways in a single ritual represents the

⁷¹ *Wei shu* 108a.2734–2735. The record contained in the annals mentions this sacrifice only very briefly: “In the third year of Tianxing [400 C.E.], on the *guihai* day, there were affairs at the northern suburb” (三年春正月]癸亥，有事於北郊). *Wei shu* 2.36.

symbolic extension of his reach, from the Tuoba past throughout the whole, newly constituted imperial territory.

Compared with the normative ritual practice entailed in the suburban sacrifices, this passage similarly exhibits a departure from the idealized ritual order of the Zhou–Han. The northern suburb is reserved for sacrifices to earth, and of course the ritual is meant to be performed on the summer solstice. Intriguingly, the passage that appears directly following the description of the performance of these two rituals in the “Ritual Treatise” articulates a principle that is apparently intended to govern imperial sacrifices of the Northern Wei thereafter:

其後，冬至祭上帝于圓丘，夏至祭地于方澤，用牲幣之屬，與二郊同。

Thenceforth, on the winter solstice, [the emperor performed] the *ji*-sacrifice to Shangdi at the round altar (*yuanqiu*); on the summer solstice, [the emperor performed] the *ji*-sacrifice to earth at the square marsh (*fangze*), using sacrificial animals and currency, as in the two suburban [sacrifices].⁷²

This is a perfect expression of the codified Han imperial suburban sacrifices, and indicates that someone was familiar with the way (the place, the time) that these sacrifices were supposed to be performed. But, as we will see, Emperor Daowu’s recorded practice of the imperial sacrifices, as represented in the *Wei shu*, nevertheless continues to be at odds with this statement of principle.

An extended description of the *si*-sacrifice to heaven at the western suburb performed during Emperor Daowu’s reign is recorded in the “Ritual Treatise” for the year 405 C.E., or the second year of the Tianci reign period:

⁷² *Wei shu* 108a.2735.

天賜二年夏四月，復祀天于西郊，為方壇一，置木主七於上。東為二陸，無等；周垣四門，門各依其方色為名。牲用白犢、黃駒、白羊各一。祭之日，帝御大駕，百官及賓國諸部大人畢從至郊所。帝立青門內近南壇西，內朝臣皆位於帝北，外朝臣及大人咸位於青門之外，后率六宮從黑門入，列於青門內近北，並西面。廩犧令掌牲，陳於壇前。女巫執鼓，立於陸之東，西面。選帝之十族子弟七人執酒，在巫南，西面北上。女巫升壇，搖鼓。帝拜，后肅拜，百官內外盡拜。祀訖，復拜。拜訖，乃殺牲。執酒七人西向，以酒灑天神主，復拜，如此者七。禮畢而返。自是之後，歲一祭。⁷³

In the second year of Tianci (405 C.E.), in the summer, in the fourth month, [the emperor] again performed the *si*-sacrifice to heaven at the western suburb, at a square *tan*-altar, on which were placed seven imperial tablets (*muzhu*). To the east there were two steps, without level, the enclosing *tan*-altar had four gates, and each of the gates was named according to its directional color. For sacrificial animals, a white calf, a yellow colt, and a white sheep were used.

On the day of the *ji*-sacrifice, the emperor arrived in a great carriage, with the hundred officials and the chieftains of all the foreign tribes following to the suburb site. The emperor stood inside the *qing*-colored gate, near the southern *tan*-altar to the west; the inner court officials were all positioned to the north of the emperor, and the outer court officials and the chieftains were all positioned outside the *qing*-colored gate. The empress led the sixth-palace (imperial concubines) to enter through the black gate, and they lined up inside the *qing*-colored gate near the north, facing west. The official of sacrificial animals (*linxiling*) conveyed the sacrifices, and arrayed them in front of the altar. The female shamans held drums, and stood to the east of the steps, facing west. The emperor selected seven sons from the ten royal clans to hold the wine, standing to the south of the shamans, facing west. The female shamans rose to the altar and beat the drums. The emperor paid obeisance, the empress solemnly paid obeisance, then the officials, inner and outer, all paid obeisance. After the *si*-sacrifice was complete, [everyone] again paid obeisance. After the obeisances were completed, the sacrificial animals were then slaughtered, and the seven people holding wine advanced westward to pour the wine on the heavenly deity's tablet, and again paid obeisance. [This was performed] seven times. After the ritual finished, [they] then returned.

Since that occasion, one *ji*-sacrifice [was to be performed] each year.

⁷³ *Wei shu* 108a.2736. Cf. the translation of a portion of this passage by Kang Le in his "An Empire for a City: Cultural Reforms of the Xiaowen Emperor," 63–64. A highly concise record of this sacrifice also appears in the annals: "In summer, the fourth month, the royal carriage had affairs at the western suburbs, and the carriage banners were all black" (夏四月，車駕有事于西郊，車旗盡黑). (*Wei shu* 2.42.)

It is this highly detailed passage that Kang Le cites as the most persuasive evidence for his assertion that even after the importation of the imperial ritual system from the central plains by the Tuoba rulers of the Northern Wei, the worship of heaven at the western suburb not only endured, it was in fact of greater importance than its culturally Han counterpart. Kang enumerates five characteristics that set the performance of this sacrifice apart: its location at the western suburbs (rather than the southern); the installation of seven ancestral tablets; the participation of imperial concubines, and of female shamans as drummers; and the active role assumed by sons of the imperial lineages.⁷⁴

While I agree that the Tuoba imperial sacrifice to heaven at the western suburbs is perhaps a vestige of northern Asian cultural traditions that somehow seems to keep creeping back in spite of the Northern Wei ministers' best efforts at stamping it out, Kang's argument does little to explain the more complicated record of Emperor Daowu's imperial sacrifices. Indeed, Emperor Daowu's performances of the imperial sacrifices to heaven were also, inexplicably, held at the eastern and northern suburbs, instances that conform to neither pattern of imperial ritual.⁷⁵ Another limitation of Kang Le's argument is the fact that it cannot account for the reiterated statements of "correct" ritual principles that accompany the narrative of Emperor Daowu's record of imperial sacrifices.

Although a detailed investigation of the performance of imperial rituals throughout the reigns of the succeeding Northern Wei emperors is beyond the scope of

⁷⁴ Kang, *Cong xijiao dao nanjiao*, 167–168.

⁷⁵ Refer to chart at the end of chapter 3 for a complete list of Emperor Daowu's suburban sacrifices.

this project, in the final section of this chapter I provide a summary of developments in the history of ritual practice in the Northern Wei following Taizu Emperor Daowu's reign, focusing on the *Wei shu* "Ritual Treatise." Broadly speaking, the list of deities to whom imperial sacrifices were offered expanded in the decades following Taizu's rule, until in 436 C.E., the minister Cui Hao 崔浩 complained that among the deities, many were not canonical, and it was therefore inappropriate to perform sacrifices to them. Moreover, in terms of the sites for sacrifices, among the fifty-seven such places, many were redundant or improperly dedicated to minor deities. The emperor (Tuoba Tao 拓跋燾, or Shizu Emperor Taiwu 太武) reportedly acceded to Cui Hao's request to discontinue such unorthodox sacrifices.⁷⁶

Another significant modification to the imperial sacrifices occurred early in the reign of the Gaozu Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 (Yuan Hong 元宏, r. 477–499 C.E.). According to the "Ritual Treatise," in light of his predecessor's sensitivity toward living beings, and with support from a passage from the *Yi jing*, the emperor allegedly ceased the practice of using live animals as sacrifices in all rituals except for the suburban sacrifices to heaven and earth, the ancestral temple sacrifices, and those at the altar of soil and grain.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Wei shu* 108a.2739: 明年六月，司徒崔浩奏議：「神祀多不經，案祀典所宜祀，凡五十七所，餘復重及小神，請皆罷之。」奏可。

⁷⁷ *Wei shu* 108a.2740: 高祖延興二年，有司奏天地五郊、社稷已下及諸神，合一千七十五所，歲用牲七萬五千五百。顯祖深愍生命，乃詔曰：「朕承天事神，以育羣品，而咸秩處廣，用牲甚眾。夫神聰明正直，享德與信，何必在牲。易曰：『東隣殺牛，不如西隣之禴祭，實受其福。』苟誠感有著，雖行潦菜羹，可以致大嘏，何必多殺，然後獲祉福哉！其命有司，非郊天地、宗廟、社稷之祀，皆無用牲。」於是羣祀悉用酒脯。“In the second year of Emperor Gaozu's Yanxing reign (472 C.E.), the officers memorialized that [sacrifices] for heaven, earth, and the five suburbs, as well as the *sheji*-altars and the lower deities, which altogether numbered one thousand seven hundred and fifty, were each year using seventy-five

An intriguing description of Emperor Xiaowen's observance of the "old affairs" at the western suburb, and indeed his alteration of the former ceremony, is noted for the sixth month of 474 C.E.⁷⁸ Emperor Xiaowen's reforms of the Taihe reign period (477–499 C.E.) have been well documented, so here I will only briefly outline the modifications to the imperial suburban sacrifices to heaven and earth undertaken during this period. In 486 C.E., the emperor is recorded as having performed the sacrifice (to heaven) at the western suburb in the fourth month.⁷⁹ A little over two years later, however, the emperor personally oversees the construction of a round altar (*yuanqiu* 圓丘) at the southern suburb.⁸⁰ In 489 C.E., the emperor is recorded as having carried out the suburban sacrifices to heaven and earth at their ritually appropriate sites: the round altar in the southern suburbs and the square pool, respectively. The "Ritual Treatise" notes succinctly: "In the thirteenth year [of the Taihe reign period, 489 C.E.], in the first

thousand and five hundred sacrificial animals. Emperor Xianzu (r. 466–471) had been deeply sensitive toward life, so he issued an edict: "...sacrificed [animals] extremely numerous. ... Why use sacrificial animals? The *Yi jing* states: 'the eastern quarter kills cows, it is not as good as the western quarter performing the *yue*-sacrifice, indeed received its fortune.' ... Even using *caigeng*, it is possible to bring about great prosperity/fortune, why is it necessary to kill so much, and then be rewarded with fortune! I order the officers thus: except for the suburban sacrifices to heaven and earth, and sacrifices at the ancestral temple and *sheji*, all others shall not use sacrificial animals." From then on the many *ji* all used wine and dried meat.

⁷⁸ *Wei shu* 108a.2740: 六月，顯祖以西郊舊事，歲增木主七，易世則更兆，其事無益於神明。初革前儀，定置主七，立碑於郊所。 "In the sixth month [of Yanxing 4th year, 474 C.E.], [the deceased] Emperor Xianzu observed the "old affairs" at the western suburbs. Each year, increased the wooden tablets to seven, when the generations changed, altering the *zhao*-place, [but] this practice did not have any benefit to the deities. For the first time [Emperor Gaozu] changed the former ceremony, and set up the seven tablets, and erected a stele at the suburb site."

⁷⁹ *Wei shu* 108a.2741: In the tenth year [of the Taihe reign period], in the fourth month, the emperor for the first time used the imperial carriage, and sacrificed at the western suburb. 十年四月，帝初以法服御輦，祀於西郊。

⁸⁰ *Wei shu* 108a.2741: In the twelfth year [of the Taihe reign period], in the intercalary ninth month, the emperor personally [oversaw] the building of a round altar at the southern suburb. 十二年閏九月，帝親築圓丘於南郊。

month, the emperor used the great carriage to hold affairs at the round altar. In the fifth month on the *gengxu* day, the carriage held affairs at the square pool.”⁸¹

Finally, in 494 C.E., after embarking on an imperial tour to the south (and while en route performing a sacrifice at the Yin–Shang Bigan tombs), Emperor Xiaowen issued an edict ordering the cessation of the sacrifice to heaven at the western suburb, and it was not practiced again for the duration of the Northern Wei.⁸²

Conclusion

The foregoing exposition of the practice of imperial ritual during the early Northern Wei is an attempt to elucidate the plurality of sources of imperial authority that were at work during the reigns of the early Tuoba emperors, especially that of its founder, Tuoba Gui, or the Taizu Emperor Daowu. I would argue that the representation in the *Wei shu* of the Northern Wei founding is a highly idealized depiction, as the account moves in a very orderly fashion from Gui’s acceptance of the mandate to rule, through a series of prerequisite actions including determination of the new state name; the building of a capital and other infrastructure; deliberations on ritual institutions, before finally arriving at Tuoba Gui’s formal accession to emperor. It is, of course, impossible to judge the degree to which the *Wei shu*’s representation of Tuoba Gui’s founding of the new imperial state is historically accurate, but my concern in this chapter lies more in comparing the different accounts within the *Wei shu* that treat this critical moment in Northern Wei history.

⁸¹ *Wei shu* 108a.2741.

⁸² *Wei shu* 108a.2751: 十八年，南巡。正月，次殷比干墓，祭以太牢。三月，詔罷西郊祭天。

As I have shown through close readings and discussion of imperial ritual in the founding reign of the imperial Northern Wei, the narrative accounts of the performance of the suburban sacrifices are not always consistent with either a “native” Tuoba tradition of heaven worship nor with the non-Tuoba tradition found in early ritual texts. In many cases, the records of such ritual performance defy affiliation with either precedent. Therefore, in contrast to the representation of the founding of the imperial Northern Wei, the *Wei shu* accounts of the suburban sacrifices appear to be far less idealized. The discrepancies between the accounts of ritual performance and the repeated statements of correct ritual protocols reveal two important points: first, that the authors of these records (whether Wei Shou or earlier historians) were well versed in such ritual protocols; second, that the historians resisted the impulse to rewrite the historiography of the early Northern Wei to bring it into alignment with such ritual protocols.

Though we can never know how the recorded imperial rituals of the early Northern Wei were performed, nor indeed whether they were performed at all, the fact that the *Wei shu* preserves these multiple perspectives affords us perhaps a glimpse of the tensions and conflicts that might have actually attended the founding of the Tuoba Northern Wei imperial state.

Imperial Suburban Sacrifices During Taizu Emperor Daowu's Reign (386–409 C.E.)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Imperial Annals</u>	<u>Ritual Treatise</u>
386 Dengguo 1 st Yr.	春正月，郊天	西向設祭，告天成禮
391 Dengguo 6 th Yr.	夏四月，祠天	n/a
399 Tianxing 2 nd Yr.	春正月，初祠上帝於南郊	正月，祀上帝於南郊
400 Tianxing 3 rd Yr.	正月，有事於北郊 二月，祀日於東郊	正月，郊天於北郊 n/a
405 Tianci 2 nd Yr.	夏四月，車駕有事于西郊	夏四月，祀天於西郊

Chapter 4

Imperial Authority and Buddhism in the Early Northern Wei

Introduction

In the inaugural year of the Xingguang reign period (454 C.E.), the Northern Wei emperor ordered that five standing figures of the Buddha Śākyamuni—representing each of the five emperors who had reigned since the Northern Wei founding—be cast in the great five-storied temple, according to an account in the *Wei shu*. Each statue was about sixteen feet in height, and the bronze used in casting all five reportedly amounted to about two hundred and fifty thousand pounds.¹ The five emperors honored with such monuments were: Taizu 太祖, Emperor Daowu 道武, the founder of the Northern Wei; Taizong 太宗, Emperor Mingyuan 明元; Shizu 世祖, Emperor Taiwu 太武; Gongzong 恭宗, Emperor Jingmu 景穆; and the reigning emperor himself, Gaozong 高宗, Emperor Wencheng 文成. The statues are not extant; nevertheless, this account from the *Wei shu*'s “Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism” is the earliest recorded instance of the representation of the imperial lineage in Buddhist monuments and, as such, is a harbinger of the colossal cave statues that would later be constructed at Yungang.² Though it is not

¹ *Wei shu* 114.3036: “In autumn of the first year of the Xingguang reign period (454 C.E.), the officers were ordered by imperial command to cast five standing figures of Śākyamuni, one for each of the five emperors from Taizu down. Each [statue] was one rod and six feet in height, and altogether two hundred fifty thousand pounds of bronze was used.” (興光元年秋，敕有司於五級大寺內，為太祖已下五帝，鑄釋迦立像五，各長一丈六尺，都用赤金二十五萬斤。) See *Wei shu* 114.3058n18 for editors' note on the correction to earlier *Wei shu* editions, which gave the weight of bronze as twenty five thousand pounds (二萬五千斤), the figure cited in modern translations by Tsukamoto and Hurvitz.

² On the Yungang cave statues, see Howard, “From the Han to the Southern Song,” in *Chinese Sculpture*, 230–236; Caswell, *Written and Unwritten: A New History of the Buddhist Caves at*

specifically attested in the *Wei shu* treatise, the first five stone Buddha statues that would be carved at Yungang are understood to represent the same five early emperors as the bronze figures described above, and were built at the recommendation of the renowned monk Tan Yao 曇曜, according to the treatise.³

My predominant concern in this chapter is the interplay between the historiography of Buddhism and the representation of imperial authority during the reigns of the early Northern Wei rulers. That the Northern Wei emperors were great patrons of Buddhism, especially toward the latter half of the dynasty, is well known. However, the status of Buddhism vis-à-vis the state in the earlier era of the dynasty, following the founding of the empire, is less well known. This chapter seeks to illuminate the narrative of the early Northern Wei rulers through the lens of the *Wei shu*'s account of Buddhism and Daoism, the “Shi Lao zhi” (釋老志). As recorded in this text, the dynamics of power between Buddhists and emperors were very much in flux during this period, and the rhetoric that each used to describe his authority reveals the ongoing working-out of the power play between them. At times, Buddhist clerics are recorded as bestowing supreme Buddhist titles on emperors—including Tathāgata, while at other times, emperors are recorded as conferring imperial titles on clerics (such as “General of Longevity”). The

Yungang. For a careful and very comprehensive account of Buddhism in the Northern Wei, see Tsukamoto Zenryū, *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism*.

³ The monk Tan Yao, having become the supervisor of śramaṇas (沙門統) early in the Heping reign period (460–466 C.E.), appealed to the emperor to build the caves, and the earliest date of construction is usually agreed on by modern scholars as 460 C.E. See *Wei shu* 114.3037: “Tan Yao appealed to the emperor to bore into the stone of the mountain wall at Wuzhou Pass, west of the capital, and open up five caves, and carve Buddha images in each [cave]. The tallest would be seventy feet high, and the next tallest sixty feet high; the engravings and adornments would be singular and grand, [and it would be] a crowning for all the world.” (曇曜白帝，於京城西武州塞，鑿山石壁，開窟五所，鑄建佛像各一。高者七十尺，次六十尺，彫飾奇偉，冠於一世。)

early Northern Wei state also instituted a new official post, that of “Supervisor of [Buddhist] Monks” (道人統), to which they appointed a succession of renowned Buddhist clerics in the capital Pingcheng. In this way, Buddhist practitioners were brought into the fold of the imperial state.

The early Northern Wei rulers were not always acquiescent toward the unprecedented flourishing of Buddhism in North China during the period. The third Northern Wei emperor, Tuoba Tao 拓跋燾 (Emperor Taiwu) initially supported Buddhism, and even took part in the ritual commemoration of the Buddha’s birthday, but later ordered its outright proscription, a persecution that would ultimately last for nearly a decade, until the emperor’s death. His successor, Tuoba Jun 拓跋濬, or Emperor Wencheng, then restored Buddhism upon his own accession, and it was during his reign that the five previous emperors—including Emperor Taiwu—were honored with the casting of the Śākyamuni statues, as described in the opening section above.

In this chapter, I investigate the account of Buddhism in Northern Wei imperial reigns from the founding emperor Tuoba Gui 拓跋珪 (Emperor Daowu), through Tuoba Jun 拓跋濬 (Emperor Wencheng). Though the succession is somewhat complicated during this early period, my treatment covers the span from the founding of empire in 386 C.E. through the moment described above, the casting of the earliest five emperors as Śākyamuni figures in 454 C.E. (Technically, only four emperors ruled during this period; the heir apparent Tuoba Huang 拓跋晃 never actually took the throne, but was posthumously honored with the title of emperor.) The political context of this period was exceedingly turbulent, and the possibility that the Northern Wei would unify north China under imperial rule far from assured. The third emperor of the Northern Wei, Tuoba Tao

拓跋燾, did in fact succeed in conquering his rival regimes to bring the diverse northern populations under his rule by 439 C.E., and his conquests brought about a great influx of Buddhist practitioners, including some who were originally from Central Asia, to the Northern Wei capital of Pingcheng.

The “Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism”

The primary source for this chapter is the *Wei shu* “Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism” (“Shi Lao zhi” 釋老志), one of ten original treatises in the history. Structurally, this treatise is organized as follows: first, it lays out a rationale for recording the history of Buddhism; next, it introduces Buddhism through both doctrine and social organization, then depicts the life of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, and finally accounts for the development and transmission of Buddhist teachings. In the following section, the treatise chronicles China’s encounters with Buddhism, opening with the reign of Emperor Wu of the Former Han. The history is traced through the Later Han, then through the Cao-Wei and Jin periods, as well as through contemporaneous non-Chinese states, and finally moves into a detailed account of the history of Buddhism throughout the pre-imperial Tuoba state and the Northern Wei, as well as its successor state, the Eastern Wei.

The Daoism section of the treatise is much briefer; comprising only about a quarter of the total length of the treatise (in other words, the Buddhism section is three times the length of the Daoism section). The structure of the Daoism section is similar to the one that treats Buddhism. It opens with a discussion of Daoism’s emergence, then traces its development through the history of earlier dynasties and through the reigns of

the Northern Wei rulers into the Eastern Wei. In this chapter, my central focus is on the Buddhism section; I treat the Daoism section only peripherally.

The opening passage of the “Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism”⁴ articulates the rationale for writing a history of Buddhism:

大人有作，司牧生民，結繩以往，書契所絕，故靡得而知焉。自羲軒已還，至於三代，其神言秘策，蘊圖緯之文，範世率民，垂墳典之迹。秦肆其毒，滅於灰燼；漢採遺籍，復若丘山。司馬遷區別異同，有陰陽、儒、墨、名、法、道德六家之義。劉歆著七略，班固志藝文，釋氏之學，所未曾紀。⁵

Great men had creations and shepherded the people, yet prior to the tying of knots, written records were cut off, and therefore their deeds cannot be known.

From the time of [Fu] Xi and Xuan [-yuan], down through the Three Dynasties, divine words and secret instructions were collected in the writings of the diagrams and apocrypha.⁶ Setting a model for the ages that would guide the people, [it was] passed down in the traces of the *fen* and *dian*.⁷

The Qin, excessive in their poison, destroyed these, reducing [it all] to ashes. The Han gathered the surviving texts, and again they became [accumulated] like hills

⁴ For my translations of the *Wei shu* “Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism,” I have consulted the English translation produced by Leon Hurvitz, whose own translation is based in turn on the annotated Japanese translation by Tsukamoto Zenryū. Hurvitz, “Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism,” in Mizuno, Seiichi, *Yungang: The Buddhist Cave-Temples of the Fifth Century A.D. in North China*, Appendix II; Tsukamoto Zenryū, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*. I have also referred to a much earlier translation of the treatise by James Ware, “Wei Shou on Buddhism.”

⁵ *Wei shu* 114.3025.

⁶ See Hurvitz, “Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism,” 25–26n7: “The phrase ‘diagrams and apocrypha’ probably refers to the legendary chart spewed forth by the Yellow River, the books believed to have been produced by the River Luo, and the so-called ‘woof books.’ These last are supposed to have been commentaries to the ‘warp books’ (i.e, the canonized classics), predicting the future and prognosticating good and ill fortune on the basis of the allegedly hidden meanings contained in the classical texts.”

⁷ The *fen* are understood as works attributed to Fuxi, Shennong, and the Yellow Emperor, and thus are collectively referred to as the three *fen* (三墳), while the *dian* are those attributed to the legendary sage-rulers Shaohao 少昊, Gaoxin 高辛, Zhuanxu 顓頊 and Tangyu 唐虞, and are known as the five *dian* (五典). See Hurvitz, “Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism,” 26n8, 26n9; Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 67.

and mountains. Sima Qian parsed the differences and similarities among the meanings of the six schools: Yinyang, Ru, Mo, Ming, Fa, and Daode. Liu Xin wrote the “Seven Outlines,” Ban Gu composed the “Yiwen,” but the learning of the Śākya clan has not yet been recorded.

The passage presents a history of writing (as the embodiment of knowledge, especially moral instruction) that originates with the two sages Fu Xi and Xuanyuan, the Yellow Emperor. Fu Xi, of course, is attributed with the invention of writing. Though other men preceded the sages, the passage asserts, their actions are simply not accessible, as no written records exist from that time. Only since the time of Fu Xi and Xuanyuan, down through the three dynasties of Xia, Shang, and Zhou, was it possible for the canon of sagely texts to be compiled and transmitted. Interestingly, the passage argues that not only were the canonical texts the most important writings, they were indeed the only ones to have existed until the advent of the Qin and Han.

The treatise then asserts that though prior historiographers composed essays on the various philosophical traditions that had emerged, no historiographer has yet compiled a history of Buddhism, or more precisely, a history of the Śākya clan learning. Wei Shou is attempting both to account for this lacuna, and to fill it himself. In declaring his intention to compose a history of Buddhism, Wei Shou is thus placing himself within a succession of historiographers, and is consciously taking on a responsibility to chronicle the entire corpus of intellectual traditions.

Early History of Tuoba Contact with Buddhism

Tuoba Ancestral Origin

As we have read elsewhere in the *Wei shu*, the Tuoba ancestors were believed to have originated in a remote northern land, and in the narrative of the Tuoba's encounter with Buddhism, we find this origin story reiterated:

魏先建國於玄朔，風俗淳一，無為以自守，與西域殊絕，莫能往來。故浮圖之教，未之得聞，或聞而未信也。⁸

The ancestors of the Wei established their state in the dark north, and their customs were simple and unitary, and they maintained themselves through *wuwei*.⁹ They were cut off from the western regions, and there was no movement between them. Therefore the doctrine of *futu* (Buddha) was not yet heard of, or if it had been heard of was not yet believed.

As in the preface to the *Wei shu* “Imperial Annals,” which I discussed at length in chapter 2, the early Tuoba are represented as primitive (their customs simple and artless), and as isolated. Whereas in the preface, we read that the Tuoba were cut off from the *nanxia*, here we discover that they were also cut off from the *xiyu*, the western regions, known as the contact area for Buddhism. As in the preface, the Tuoba existed in a primitive time and remote space.

Contact with Buddhism

According to the treatise, the first contact the Tuoba have with Buddhism occurs during the reign of Tuoba Liwei 拓跋力微 (the Shizu 始祖 Emperor Shenyuan 神元),

⁸ *Wei shu* 114.3030.

⁹ Hurvitz understands *wuwei* in the Daoist interpretation of “non-action,” but Tsukamoto evidently did not understand it in this way. See Hurvitz, “Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism,” 50n1 [38]; Cf. Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 147–148 for annotated translation of this passage. I take *wuwei* as a more generalized concept, invoking a positive meaning of simply existing, as the indication that the early Tuoba ancestors were represented as Daoists would certainly be over-reading.

through his son Shamohan 沙漠汗 (Emperor Wen 文), and is carried through the later experiences of Shiyijian 什翼健 (Emperor Zhaocheng 昭成):

及神元與魏、晉通聘，文帝久在洛陽，昭成又至襄國，乃備究南夏佛法之事。¹⁰

Then Shen Yuan opened diplomatic exchanges with [Cao-] Wei and Jin, and Wendi stayed in Luoyang for a long period. [Emperor] Zhaocheng also went to Xiangguo, and thereupon completely learned about the Law of the Buddha in *nanxia* (at the time).

As I discussed at some length in my description of the Shamohan narrative in chapter 2, Shamohan was sent as a diplomatic hostage to the Jin capital of Luoyang twice, but he never returned to the Tuoba state after his second stay. (For this reason, Tsukamoto regards the impression that Shamohan influenced the Tuoba in the realm of Buddhism as highly dubious.¹¹) That Shiyijian (Emperor Zhaocheng) was influenced by Buddhism while seeking refuge in the Later Zhao with the rulers Shi Le and Shi Hu is more conceivable.¹² The site of transmission in both of these instances is within *nanxia*: first the Jin capital then the Later Zhao capital, at a considerably later date.

¹⁰ *Wei shu* 114.3030.

¹¹ Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 147–148n1. In Hurvitz’s translation: “It is highly questionable that Shamohan studied Buddhism, but, even if he did, it is scarcely conceivable that a knowledge of Buddhism spread throughout the Tabghac nation as a result. This seems to be an attempt on the part of the author to carry the love of Buddhism, which did characterize the Northern Wei at the height of its glory, back to Emperor Shen Yuan, the founder of the dynasty.” 51n1 [39].

¹² As Hurvitz (following Tsukamoto) asserts, “In the Shi clan’s capital Fotudeng was treated almost as a living god, and Buddhism was climbing to great heights of glory thanks to the efforts of Dao’an and his fellows. Zhaocheng, after Shi Hu’s eclipse, became very friendly with Murong Yan, the next person to make his capital at Ye. When Fu Jian began to loom large at Chang’an, Zhaocheng shifted his allegiance to him and had his son educated at Chang’an. In Chang’an under Fu Jian, with Dao’an as prize booty from the sack of Xiangyang, Buddhism was in a very prosperous state. Therefore by Zhaocheng’s time Buddhism had probably penetrated the Tabghac

Reign of Tuoba Gui (Taizu, Emperor Daowu)

The next passage describes the status of Buddhism at the moment of the Northern Wei founding by Tuoba Gui, and then throughout his reign as its first emperor, Taizu, Emperor Daowu. The account opens with Tuoba Gui's conquest of the states of Yan and Zhao, and his personal encounters with Buddhist monks:

太祖平中山，經略燕趙，所逕郡國佛寺，見諸沙門、道士，皆致精敬，禁軍旅無有所犯。帝好黃老，頗覽佛經。但天下初定，戎車屢動，庶事草創，未建圖宇，招延僧眾也。然時時旁求。¹³

When Taizu pacified Zhongshan and absorbed the land of Yan and Zhao, throughout all the *jun* and *guo* through which he passed, he saw that the śramaṇas and the monks were all deeply respectful, and he restrained his attacking armies so that there was no offense against them. The emperor loved Huanglao [thought] (the Yellow Emperor and Laozi), and occasionally perused the Buddhist sutras.

However, *tianxia* had only just been settled, and the militia carriages were often on the move. The (administrative) affairs had only just been drafted, and they had not yet established the Buddhist temples, nor summoned the Buddhist clergy, though from time to time there were visits by them or they were sought out.

The description of Emperor Daowu's first contact with Buddhist practitioners is portrayed with compassion, and protection, on his part. He recognizes Buddhist monks as holding a unique status, and on the basis of such a status orders that they be protected.

nation to some extent under the influence of the Later Zhao and the Former Qin, but certainly not to the extent that the *Shilaozhi* would have us believe," 51n1 [39]; See also Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 147–148n1. For an analysis of Buddhism in the state of Later Zhao, see Tsukamoto, *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism*, 1:251–274.

¹³ *Wei shu* 114.3030. See Hurvitz, "Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism," 51n1 [40]: "It was at this time [after capital est. at Pingcheng] that the active efforts of Buddhist cleric to convert the simple Tabghac people had much to do with the establishment of the Northern Wei, for the entire Pingcheng area had been the scene of vigorous missionary activity on the part of Fotudeng, Dao'an, etc.," following Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 149n1.

Interestingly, the account implies that such protection was somewhat imperfect; the “moment” for the establishment of Buddhism, including the building of temples and formal organization of monastic orders, has not yet arrived.

In the year that Tuoba Gui proclaims himself emperor of the Northern Wei, however, he issues an edict officially recognizing Buddhism, and begins construction of dedicated spaces within the new capital Pingcheng for its practice:

天興元年，下詔曰：「夫佛法之興，其來遠矣。濟益之功，冥及存沒，神蹤遺軌，信可依憑。其敕有司，於京城建飾容範，修整宮舍，令信向之徒，有所居止。」是歲，始作五級佛圖、耆闍崛山及須彌山殿，加以續飾。別構講堂、禪堂及沙門座，莫不嚴具焉。¹⁴

In the first year of the Tianxing reign (398 C.E.), an edict was sent down saying: “Since the rise of the Buddha Law, it has now been a long time. Its powers of aiding and beneficence mystically extend to existence and death. Through its divine traces and bequeathed models, the beliefs are well founded. I command the officers to build and adorn the [Buddhist] images at the capital city, to restore the palace residences, and to send letters to all disciples, that they have a place to stay.”

In that year, they began to create the five-story stupa, and the Mount Qishequ and Mount Xumi halls, which they adorned with decorations. Separately [they] built a lecture hall, a meditation hall, and cells for śramaṇas, and it was all grandly appointed.¹⁵

Tuoba Gui’s personal affinity for Buddhism is explicitly stated, and then is also illustrated through two profoundly meaningful anecdotes that concern Tuoba Gui’s

¹⁴ *Wei shu* 114.3030.

¹⁵ For the identification of Mt. Qishequ and Mt. Xumi, see Hurvitz, “Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism,” 52n3–4 [42]: “Qishequ is a transcription of some Prakritic form of Skt. Grḍhrakūṭa, ‘Vulture Peak,’ of the mountains on which the Buddha was believed to have done much of his preaching.... Xumi is a transcription of some abbreviated form of Sumeru, the mountain which according to Indian cosmology is at the center of the world,” following Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 151.

relationship with individual monks. The first concerns a monk named Senglang 僧朗, and casts Tuoba Gui as a magnanimous patron of Buddhism:

先是，有沙門僧朗，與其徒隱于泰山之琨谷。帝遣使致書，以繒、素、旃罽、銀鉢為禮。今猶號曰朗公谷焉。

Prior to this time, there was a śramaṇa named Senglang, who along with his followers went into reclusion in Kun valley at Mount Tai. The emperor sent an envoy with a letter, and gifted him variegated silk, plain white silk, felted wool, and a silver alms bowl (Sk., pātra). In present times there is still [a place there] named Honorable Lang Valley.

In the second, much more involved anecdote, Tuoba Gui's ongoing relationship with a monk named Faguo 法果 is traced, with important implications for Tuoba Gui's image in the text. Faguo's exceptionally long life spanned the reigns of both Tuoba Gui and his successor Tuoba Si 拓跋嗣 (Taizong 太宗). I excerpt here the passage that concerns the relationship between Faguo and Tuoba Gui:

初，皇始中，趙郡有沙門法果，誠行精至，開演法籍。太祖聞其名，詔以禮徵赴京師。後以為道人統，縮攝僧徒。每與帝言，多所愜允，供施甚厚。¹⁶

...

初，法果每言，太祖明叡好道，即是當今如來，沙門宜應盡禮，遂常致拜。謂人曰：「能鴻道者人主也，我非拜天子，乃是禮佛耳。」

Earlier, in the Huangshi reign (396–398 C.E.) [of Taizu], in Zhao prefecture there was a śramaṇa named Faguo, whose monastic conduct was pure and who held lectures on the texts of the [Buddha] Law. Taizu heard his name, and decreed that he be summoned to appear at the capital. Later he was made Supervisor of Daoren (Buddhists), and he managed and oversaw the disciples. Every time he spoke with the emperor, the emperor was usually satisfied, and he treated him lavishly.

...

¹⁶ *Wei shu* 114.3030.

Earlier, Faguo would always say that Taizu is enlightened and loves the [Buddhist] Way, and he is a present-day tathāgata, and śramaṇas should honor him, and thereupon they always did obeisance to him. He would say to others, “He who is able to spread the Way, is the master of the people. I am not paying obeisance to the son of heaven, but am only honoring the Buddha.”

The founding emperor of the Northern Wei state, having been anointed a tathāgata, thus deserves the loyalty of the Buddhist monks. It is very clear through this account that Faguo is represented as stating a minority opinion on whether Buddhists should submit to imperial authority. Faguo, having accepted the title of “Daoren tong,” or supervisor of the Buddhist community in the Northern Wei capital, is represented as working on behalf of the emperor, and thus his declaration that serving Tuoba Gui constitutes serving the Buddha reads like a defense of his actions and position. Nevertheless, his naming of Taizu as a tathāgata, or “one who has thus come/gone” signifies that Taizu is meant to have attained a state of enlightenment and transcendence that allowed him to become a Buddha (or at least Buddha-like).

Reign of Taizong, Tuoba Si

The imperial patronage of Buddhism continues in the reign of Tuoba Gui’s successor, Tuoba Si 拓跋嗣 (Taizong 太宗 Emperor Mingyuan 明元; r. 409–423):

太宗踐位，遵太祖之業，亦好黃老，又崇佛法，京邑四方，建立圖像，仍令沙門敷導民俗。¹⁷

Taizong took the throne, and honored the work of Taizu. He similarly loved Huanglao [thought] (the Yellow Emperor and Laozi), and revered the Buddha

¹⁷ *Wei shu* 114.3030.

Law. Throughout the capital, [he] built and erected stupas¹⁸ and statues, and continued to command the śramaṇas to teach and guide the customs of the people.

After coming to power, Taizong also continues to treat the monk Faguo with respect, and attempts to confer upon him various titles, all of which Faguo declines:

至太宗，彌加崇敬，永興中，前後授以輔國、宜城子、忠信侯、安成公之號，皆固辭。帝常親幸其居，以門小狹，不容輿輦，更廣大之。年八十餘，泰常中卒。未殯，帝三臨其喪，追贈老壽將軍、趙胡靈公。¹⁹

By the time of [Emperor] Taizong, [Faguo] was even more venerated, and in the Yongxing reign period (409–411 C.E.), he was proffered the various titles of Assister of the State, the *Zi* of Yicheng, the Loyal and Faithful Marquis, and the Peaceful and Accomplished Duke, but he declined all of them. The emperor often personally visited his residence, and as the gate was small and narrow, it would not allow a carriage to pass, so [the emperor] widened it. At the age of more than eighty [*sui*], in the Taichang reign period (416–424 C.E.), he died. Before [his body] was encoffined, the emperor three times approached to mourn him, and posthumously bestowed upon him [the titles] Longevity General and Numinous Duke of the Zhao *hu*.

As is clear in this passage, which is the continuation of the earlier narrative on Faguo, the accounts of such monks are intertwined with the reigns of the Northern Wei emperors. Indeed, it is not the emperors who appear as the actors in much of this early history, but the monks. In this passage, Emperor Mingyuan only achieves his aim of conferring official titles (Longevity General and Numinous Duke) after Faguo's death, when the latter is no longer able to refuse them. Moreover, the emperor orders that at the time of

¹⁸ I follow Tsukamoto in translating *tuxiang* as stupas and statues (See Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 152n1: “圖像は仏の圖像ではなく、仏図（塔廟＝仏寺）や仏像の義であろう。” Cf. translation by Hurvitz as “images and statues,” in his “Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism,” 52.

¹⁹ *Wei shu* 114.3030–3031.

Faguo's death, Faguo's son Meng shall inherit the titles conferred upon his father.²⁰ The emperor is viewed as venerating the monk, rather than the other way around, as we saw in Taizu's relationship with Faguo.

Faguo is not the only Buddhist who is honored by Emperor Taizong. Another brief anecdote describes Taizong's encounter with another śramaṇa while traveling:

帝後幸廣宗，有沙門曇證，年且百歲。邀見於路，奉致果物。帝敬其年老志力不衰，亦加以老壽將軍號。²¹

The emperor later visited Guangzong, where there was a śramaṇa named Tanzheng, whose age was exactly one hundred *sui*. [The emperor] met him while on the road, and he offered the emperor some fruit. The emperor respected that though his years were advanced, the power of his will had not declined, and [the emperor] also bestowed upon him the title of Longevity General.

A tension underlies these accounts of the early Northern Wei emperors and their encounters with Buddhist monks. The rulers seek to integrate the monks into the political order, through invitations to reside in newly constructed monasteries in the capital Pingcheng, as well as by extending titles to them. Faguo being named the “Daoren tong” (Supervisor of Buddhists) most clearly exemplifies this phenomenon, but the naming of monks with honorific titles such as “Longevity General” also incorporates them into the imperial authority (though it is unclear exactly what privileges would flow from such a title). Nevertheless, the act of naming also goes in the other direction; Faguo's naming of Taizu as a tathāgata serves to incorporate Taizu into the Buddhist order, and of course only a well-placed monk would be authorized to name someone in this way. Meanwhile, as discussed above, the Buddhist monk Faguo appears to have been under some pressure

²⁰ *Wei shu* 114.3031: 法果四十，始為沙門。有子曰猛，詔令襲果所加爵。

²¹ *Wei shu* 114.3031.

from the Buddhist community not to serve the emperor; his defense of his own behavior reads as a rather desperate effort to construct a rationale.

Reign of Tuoba Tao, Shizu Emperor Taiwu

Tuoba Tao, the third emperor of the Northern Wei (r. 424–452 C.E.), is introduced in the treatise presiding over a scene of Buddhist veneration through the commemoration of the Buddha's (Śākyamuni's) birthday:

世祖初即位，亦遵太祖、太宗之業，每引高德沙門，與共談論。於四月八日，輿諸佛像，行於廣衢，帝親御門樓，臨觀散花，以致禮敬。²²

At the time that Shizu (Tuoba Tao) ascended the throne, he followed the work of [Emperors] Taizu and Taizong, and always invited in śramaṇas of high virtue, to discuss and debate with them. On the eighth day of the fourth month, all of the Buddhist images would be conveyed by carriages and marched through the wide thoroughfares [of the capital]. The emperor would personally present himself at the gate tower, and would approach to observe and scatter flowers, and in this way would perform his veneration.

Viewed in comparison to the representation of his predecessors, Tuoba Tao is portrayed as actively practicing a Buddhist ritual, personally participating in the celebration of the Buddha's birthday. His participation in the procession, even though it is performed from a remove overlooking the events, signals his public devotion to Buddhism.

The narrative of Tuoba Tao's reign continues with his seeking out of famous Buddhist monks and his conquest of rival northern regimes during the same period. His first attempted acquisition is of a śramaṇa named Tanmochen 曇摩讖, who had been

²² *Wei shu* 114.3032. Tsukamoto details the development of celebrating Buddha's birthday in other northern regimes of this period in his *History of Early Chinese Buddhism*, 270–280. See also the extended discussion in Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 165–166n1, and translation by Hurvitz, “Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism,” 56–57.

promoted by the ruler of Northern Liang 涼, a state located in the far northwest and ruled by the Xiongnu leader Juqu Mengxun:

先是，沮渠蒙遜在涼州，亦好佛法。有罽賓沙門曇摩讖，習諸經論。於姑臧，與沙門智嵩等，譯涅槃諸經十餘部。又曉術數、禁呪，歷言他國安危，多所中驗。蒙遜每以國事諮之。

神廳中，帝命蒙遜送讖詣京師，惜而不遣。既而，懼魏威責，遂使人殺讖。讖死之日，謂門徒曰：「今時將有客來，可早食以待之。」食訖而走使至。時人謂之知命。²³

Before this, when Juqu Mengxun was in Liangzhou, he also loved the Buddha Law. There was a Jibin (Kashmiri) śramaṇa [named] Tanmochen, who copied all the sutras and treatises. In Guzang, along with the śramaṇa Zhisong and others, he translated the *Nirvana* and other sutras, totaling more than ten in number. He was also knowledgeable about fortune telling, and incantations. One by one he spoke on the security of other states, and in many [instances], his words hit the mark. Mengxun always conferred with him on affairs of state.

During the Shenjia reign (428–432 C.E.), the emperor commanded Mengxun to deliver [Tanmo-] Chen to the capital, but grudging [to let Tanmochen go], he did not send him. Later, fearful of Wei's mighty punishment, he sent a man to kill Chen. On the day Chen was to die, he spoke to his disciples, saying, "A guest will soon arrive, let us eat early in order to await him." They finished eating and a swift rider arrived. The people of the time said that [Chen] knew his fate.

Juqu Mengxun would apparently rather kill Tanmochen than deliver him to the Northern Wei capital. Tanmochen seems to signify two powerful advantages to Juqu: his political prescience and his reputation as a devout Buddhist, neither of which he is prepared to consign to Tuoba Tao.

The conquest of Liangzhou by the Northern Wei ruler Tuoba Tao resulted not only in the unification of the north by a single regime, but also brought the transfer of Buddhist monks and materials (and knowledge) to Pingcheng, the Northern Wei capital.

²³ *Wei shu* 114.3032.

Indeed, according to the treatise, the capital became nearly overrun with Buddhist devotees. A passage in the treatise describes the circumstances of Buddhism in the area of Liangzhou around this time:

涼州自張軌後，世信佛教。敦煌地接西域，道俗交得其舊式，村塢相屬，多有塔寺。太延中，涼州平，徙其國人於京邑，沙門佛事皆俱東，象教彌增矣。尋以沙門眾多，詔罷年五十已下者。²⁴

Liangzhou had, since Zhang Gui through the generations believed the Buddhist teachings. Dunhuang abuts the western regions, and the clergy and laity both attained the old fashions. The villages and towns each had many stupas and temples. During the Taiyan reign period (435–440 C.E.), Liangzhou was pacified and the people of its state were transferred to the capital areas. Both śramaṇas and Buddhist practices came eastward, and the images and doctrine prospered. Then, because the śramaṇas were so numerous, an edict was issued that those under age fifty would be defrocked.

Another mention of Tuoba Tao's collection of Buddhists appears in the story of Huishi 惠始, whom he “acquired” after his conquest of the Xiongnu state of Xia 夏. The first part of the passage is excerpted here:

世祖初平赫連昌，得沙門惠始，姓張。家本清河，聞羅什出新經，遂詣長安見之，觀習經典。坐禪於白渠北，晝則入城聽講，夕則還處靜坐。三輔有識多宗之。²⁵

²⁴ *Wei shu* 114.3032. As Tsukamoto points out, the conquest of Liangzhou and the subsequent transfer of its population to the Northern Wei capital occurred in the fifth year of the Taiyan reign period (439 C.E.), according to the annals. See Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 174–175n6; and translation by Hurvitz, “Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism,” 61n1. Also as noted by Tsukamoto, there is a discrepancy between the date recorded for this edict in the annals and the treatise. According to the annals, the edict was issued in the fourth year of Taiyan (438 C.E.), and thus prior to the conquest of Liangzhou. Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 176n8; Hurvitz, “Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism,” 61n3. By transposing the chronology of these two events, the effect is to imply a causal connection between the recent transfer of many monks to the capital and the edict to limit their numbers. Indeed, if the edict was issued prior to the population shift, then we must seek a rationale elsewhere.

²⁵ *Wei shu* 114.3032–3033.

Earlier, Shizu had pacified (the Xiongnu leader) Helian Chang, and acquired the śramaṇa Hui Shi, surnamed Zhang. His family was originally from Qinghe. Hearing that Kumarajiva had put out some new sutras, he left for Chang'an to see him, and to observe [him] copying the sutra texts. He sat in meditation north of Baiqu, during the day he would come within the city wall to listen to lectures, and at night he would return to his place to sit in stillness. Of those with knowledge about the *sanfu*, many revered him.

The narrative of Huishi continues and turns into a revealing hagiography, as he escapes unscathed through the attack by the southern general Liu Yu on Chang'an in the process of his overthrow of the Later Qin. Following Huishi's arrival in the Northern Wei capital, where he continues to instruct and provide Buddhist guidance, the treatise records, "among those of the time, there was none who [could] estimate his the traces he would leave behind (his achievements). Shizu held him in high esteem, and always conferred upon him courtesies and honors" (時人莫測其迹。世祖甚重之，每加禮敬).²⁶ After his death, his corpse retains its shape and color, and even after his reburial ten years later, there is no sign of decay. In a striking instance of foreshadowing, his own image that had been painted on his tombstone remains perfectly intact throughout the persecution of Buddhism that would occur later in Shizu's reign (惠始冢上，立石精舍，圖其形像。經毀法時，猶自全立).²⁷

The figure of Tuoba Tao deepens in complexity in the next section of the treatise. He is portrayed as a ruler whose instincts run first to military conquest, and whose acquisition of Buddhist adepts is merely secondary. His interest in the śramaṇas is focused on the pursuit of power and advantage, and he seems to have little sincere

²⁶ *Wei shu* 114.3033.

²⁷ *Wei shu* 114.3033.

personal interest in Buddhist knowledge or practice. Indeed, he eventually yields to the suasion of the Daoist Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 and his promoter at court, the minister Cui Hao 崔浩. The treatise summarizes Tuoba Tao's falling under their influence:²⁸

世祖即位，富於春秋。既而銳志武功，每以平定禍亂為先。雖歸宗佛法，敬重沙門，而未存覽經教，深求緣報之意。及得寇謙之道，帝以清淨無為，有仙化之證，遂信行其術。時司徒崔浩，博學多聞，帝每訪以大事。浩奉謙之道，尤不信佛，與帝言，數加非毀，常謂虛誕，為世費害。帝以其辯博，頗信之。²⁹

When Shizu came to power, he was still young. Later he sharpened his will to military exploits, and every time prioritized the pacification of rebellions. Though he turned to venerate the Buddha Law, and revered and valued the śramaṇas, he did not yet peruse the sutras and teachings, nor deeply sought the meaning of cause and effect (karma). Then he attained the Way of Kou Qian, and the emperor contemplated *qingjing* and *wuwei*, [thinking] that they had evidence of being immortality-transforming, and thereupon believed in it and practiced its arts. At that time the minister was Cui Hao, who was erudite and worldly, and the emperor always consulted with him on matters of importance. Hao presented Qian's Way, and he also did not believe in Buddhism. He spoke with the emperor, and would often insult Buddhism, always saying slanderous things and calling it a harm and drain upon the world. The emperor, owing to Cui's perspicacity, came to somewhat believe him.

In the narrative of Tuoba Tao's reign, the experience of turning his mind toward Daoism and against Buddhism would have dire consequences.

According to the treatise, Tuoba Tao's repression of Buddhism and ultimately prohibition apparently comes as the consequence of a stunning discovery of wrongdoing

²⁸ Kou Qianzhi (365–448 C.E.), *zi* Fuzhen 輔真, was the younger brother of an official in southern Yongzhou, and he himself came from Changping, in Shanggu. Kou Qianzhi is recorded as having received the title “Celestial Master” (*tianshi* 天師) on Mt. Song from Laozi himself. See *Wei shu* 114.3051 for this anecdote. The Daoism section of the “Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism” elaborates his relationship with Tuoba Tao, the Shizu Emperor. See *Wei shu* 114.3049–3055.

²⁹ *Wei shu* 114.3033.

by monks at a Chang'an monastery. The context is the rebellion of Gai Wu, and the campaign by the Northern Wei to suppress it:

會蓋吳反杏城，關中騷動，帝乃西伐，至於長安。先是，長安沙門種麥寺內，御驪牧馬於麥中，帝入觀馬。沙門飲從官酒，從官入其便室，見大有弓矢矛盾，出以奏聞。帝怒曰：「此非沙門所用，當與蓋吳通謀，規害人耳！」命有司案誅一寺，閱其財產，大得釀酒具及州郡牧守富人所寄藏物，蓋以萬計。又為屈室，與貴室女私行淫亂。帝既忿沙門非法，浩時從行，因進其說。詔誅長安沙門，焚破佛像，敕留臺下四方令，一依長安行事。³⁰

At that time Gai Wu³¹ rebelled in Xingcheng, and [the area] within the passes became tumultuous. The emperor then struck westward and reached Chang'an. Earlier, the Chang'an śramaṇas had planted grain within the temple, and the imperial grooms were grazing the horses on the grain, when the emperor entered to observe the horses. The śramaṇas gave the attendants wine to drink, and when the attendants entered the common rooms, they saw great quantities of bows and arrows, spears and shields, and came out to report this to the emperor. The emperor was angered, and said, "These are not used by śramaṇas! They must be scheming with Gai Wu, intending to do harm!" [The emperor] ordered the officers to examine and punish the whole temple. When they searched the property, they found wine fermenting implements and articles of treasure held on behalf of the state administrators and other wealthy people, numbering in the tens of thousands. Hidden rooms had also been made, in which the monks practiced debauchery with the daughters of noble families. The emperor was already infuriated at the illegalities of the śramaṇas, and [Cui] Hao was accompanying him at the time, so Cui advanced his own opinion (on the matter).

An edict was issued ordering the killing of the Chang'an śramaṇas, and the burning and destruction of the Buddhist images. It was also decreed to the *liutai* (the crown prince regent) that the actions carried out at Chang'an should be ordered for all areas within the four quarters [of the land].

³⁰ *Wei shu* 114.3033–3034.

³¹ As cited by Hurvitz and Tsukamoto, Gai Wu is referred to in the *Wei shu* annals only as a "hu from Lushui" (盧水胡), and his rebellion is recorded for the year 445 C.E., in the ninth month. The Northern Wei campaign against Gai Wu is dated to 445–446 C.E. See Hurvitz, "Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism," 65n1, following Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 185n2.

The totality of illicit practices by the monks of the Chang'an monastery (they are found to be guilty not only of storing weaponry, but also of holding the riches of local officials and wealthy families, presumably at a price, and on top of all that had indulged in sexual liaisons with women of elite backgrounds) signals that perhaps more underlies this narrative. The immediate cause for Tuoba Tao's destruction of Buddhism throughout Northern Wei territory is presented in the treatise as the monks' transgressive acts; however, this is actually not the first instance of Tuoba Tao's suppression of Buddhism, according to the treatise.

The anecdote of the Gai Wu rebellion and its aftermath continues with the record of another edict from Tuoba Tao, apparently issued around the same date:

又詔曰：「彼沙門者，假西戎虛誕，妄生妖孽，非所以一齊政化，布淳德於天下也。自王公已下，有私養沙門者，皆送官曹，不得隱匿。限今年二月十五日，過期不出，沙門身死，容止者誅一門。」³²

Another edict said: "These śramaṇas, they borrow the empty falsehoods of the western *rong* and recklessly create disaster and calamity. This is not the way to unify the governance of the world, nor the way to spread the pure virtuous power throughout *tianxia*. From princes and dukes on down, if there is anyone who is privately harboring śramaṇas, they shall be delivered up to the officials. They cannot hide them. Anyone who passes the deadline of the fifteenth day of the second month without offering up the śramaṇas shall be killed. As for those who [are found to] harbor them, their whole family shall be executed.

According to the terms of this edict, apparently promulgated after the incident at the Chang'an monastery, attempting to protect monks is also a punishable crime, and the penalty is death. However, as Tsukamoto has observed, this edict is an interpolation here;

³² *Wei shu* 114.3034.

it was issued in the first month of 444 C.E., or nearly two years prior to the date of the Gai Wu rebellion in the ninth month of 445 C.E.³³

The chronological discrepancy between the annals and the treatise seems to reflect an effort by Wei Shou to attribute every move of Tuoba Tao's in suppressing Buddhism to his discovery of the illicit acts by the Chang'an monks. Tuoba Tao's intent to move against Buddhism is primed through the account of his falling under the influence of Kou Qianzhi and Cui Hao, but it is only the discovery of transgressions by the monks that sets the persecution of Buddhism into motion. In this sense, the treatise perhaps attempts to construct a more understandable narrative of Tuoba Tao's actions.

Notably, however, Tuoba Tao's proscription of Buddhism, with penalties of death for those who violate it, does not go unchallenged. The heir apparent, Tuoba Huang 拓跋晃, is portrayed as a practicing Buddhist himself, and he repeatedly appeals to the emperor for leniency:

時恭宗為太子監國，素敬佛道。頻上表，陳刑殺沙門之濫，又非圖像之罪。今罷其道，杜諸寺門，世不修奉，土木丹青，自然毀滅。如是再三，不許。³⁴

At this time, Gongzong was the crown prince regent, and he had purely venerated the Buddha Way. He often sent up memorials [to the emperor], laying out the excesses of punishing the śramaṇas by death, and also [stating] that the Buddha images themselves had no culpability. Now to put an end to this Way, shutting all the gates of the temples, and [allowing them to go] unrepaired and not served for generations, the red and green pigments of the earth and wood would naturally decay and be ruined.

[He appealed] in this way three times, and was not acceded to.

³³ See Tsukamoto, *Gisho Shaku-Rōshi no kenkyū*, 185n2, for the relative dating of these events.

³⁴ *Wei shu* 114.3034.

Though his protests were reportedly unheeded, it is interesting to note that his argument centers on the preservation of Buddhist material culture: the Buddha images and monastic structures. His desire for protection of such materials signals a hope for a time in the future at which Buddhism will be restored and practiced once again.

It is the heir apparent's continual memorials that seem to inspire Tuoba Tao to issue his most vituperative and all-encompassing indictment of Buddhism, which essentially declares that Buddhism, a foreign delusion, has no place in the "nine provinces" (九州):

乃下詔曰：「昔後漢荒君，信惑邪偽，妄假睡夢，事胡妖鬼，以亂天常，自古九州之中無此也。夸誕大言，不本人情。叔季之世，闇君亂主，莫不眩焉。由是政教不行，禮義大壞，鬼道熾盛，視王者之法，蔑如也。自此以來，代經亂禍，天罰亟行，生民死盡，五服之內，鞠為丘墟，千里蕭條，不見人迹，皆由於此。」

朕承天緒，屬當窮運之弊，欲除偽定真，復義農之治。其一切盪除胡神，滅其蹤迹，庶無謝於風氏矣。自今以後，敢有事胡神及造形像泥人、銅人者，門誅。

雖言胡神，問今胡人，共云無有。皆是前世漢人無賴子弟劉元真、呂伯強之徒，接乞胡之誕言，用老莊之虛假，附而益之，皆非真實。至使王法廢而不行，蓋大姦之魁也。

有非常之人，然後能行非常之事。非朕孰能去此歷代之偽物！有司宣告征鎮諸軍、刺史，諸有佛圖形像及胡經，盡皆擊破焚燒，沙門無少長悉坑之。」³⁵

Thereupon an edict was sent down saying: "Formerly, a profligate sovereign of the Later Han believed in and became confused by evil and deceit. On the false pretext of a dream while he slept, he served the beguiling demons of the *hu* and

³⁵ *Wei shu* 114.3034–3035. This edict was recorded as having been issued in the third month of the seventh year of the Zhenjun reign period (i.e., 446 C.E.).

thereby disturbed the order of heaven. Since ancient times, this (Buddhism) had never existed within the nine provinces. Its exaggerated grandiloquence is not based on any human emotion. In later ages, among dimmed sovereigns and rulers gone astray, there was not one who was not dazzled by it. Therefore governance and teaching have not been undertaken, and propriety and righteousness have greatly decayed. The Way of the demons blazed vigorously, and looked upon the Law of kings as though it were nothing. Since that time, the generations have passed through chaos and calamity. The punishment of heaven has been quick to come, and the people have utterly perished. Within the *wufu* (five zones of submission to the imperial order), all became mounds and ruins; for a thousand *li* is only desolation, the traces of people cannot be seen, and it is all because of this (Buddhism).

We have inherited the heavenly lineage, just at the moment of the evil of exhausted fortune. We desire to get rid of the deceitful, and to rectify the true, to restore the rule of [Fu] Xi and [Shen-] nong. We will completely shake off the *hu*-deities and annihilate their vestiges, and thereby, we hope, will have no occasion to beg forgiveness of the Feng clan. If from now on there be any who dare serve the *hu*-deities or create images, statues, or figures in clay and bronze, their households will be executed.

Although one speaks of the *hu*-deities, if one inquires about this of a *hu*-person, they all say that they do not have such [deities]. It is all [the work of] the followers of two unreliable youths of the Former Han, Liu Yuanchen and Lü Boqiang, who sought the false words of the *hu*, used the empty nothingness of Laozi and Zhuangzi, and attached them together to augment it; none of it is the truth. As they caused the Law of kings to be cast off and not be followed, they were thus the instigators of the great transgression.

If there are extraordinary men, then extraordinary acts may be performed. If not for me, who could get rid of this age-old forgery! The officers will disseminate the notice to the generals of all the garrisons and to the governors, that all Buddhist stupas, images, statues, and the *hu*-sutras, shall be seized and destroyed by fire, and the śramaṇas, without regard to age, shall all be buried alive.

The edict opens by declaiming that Buddhism is a scourge on the land of the nine provinces, and is fundamentally nothing but a great deception. The reference to Buddhism infiltrating the Chinese cultural order through a dream recklessly dreamt by an emperor of the Later Han alludes to the anecdote of Emperor Xiaoming, whose dream

and its interpretation is explicated in the earlier section of the treatise.³⁶ The characterization of Buddhist deities as “beguiling demons of the *hu*” (胡妖鬼) makes it clear that this attack is premised upon the foreign origin of Buddhism. The “profligate sovereign” of the Later Han was the entry point for the false religion, and once it permeated the nine provinces, the cause of all failed rulers was their seduction into believing these falsities. The rhetoric of this edict sets up a conflict between Buddhism and the Way of kings: with Buddhism becoming ever more powerful, the Way of kings wanes. Heaven’s retribution is swift: destruction and chaos are meted out, and the post-Han landscape is one of ruin and desolation.

Yet Tuoba Tao’s indictment of Buddhism then asserts that beliefs in these “*hu shen*” 胡神 do not actually exist at all among the *hu* (雖言胡神，問今胡人，共云無有). Indeed, his edict claims, Buddhism and its *hu*-deities were all the fabrication by two Former Han “unreliable youths,” Liu Yuanchen and Lü Boqiang, who grafted the lies of the *hu* onto the (true) nothingness of the Daoists Laozi and Zhuangzi. These two men were thus the antagonists behind the “great transgression” (大姦) that Buddhist thought represents.

Tuoba Tao’s denunciation of Buddhism casts the Northern Wei ruler as the protector of the inheritance bequeathed by the ancient sages Fu Xi and Shennong, creators of the Chinese cultural order. The Northern Wei alone is capable of destroying the *hu* deities and obliterating their traces within its territory. Tuoba Tao then proclaims

³⁶ *Wei shu* 114.3025: 後孝明帝夜夢金人，項有日光，飛行殿庭，乃訪羣臣，傅毅始以佛對。 “Later, Emperor Xiaoming in the night dreamt of a golden person, whose neck had the light of a sun (halo), flying into the hall. He inquired about it of his ministers, and Fu Yi was the first to reply that it was a Buddha.”

the official proscription of Buddhism: all those who serve the *hu*-deities shall be executed with their whole households, and throughout the land, all śramaṇas shall be put to death, and all Buddhist stupas, images, statues, and *hu*-sutras shall be destroyed. In short, Tuoba Tao orders the utter annihilation of Buddhism.

Tuoba Tao's efforts are undermined by the precautions of the heir apparent (referred to here by his posthumous emperor name Gongzong), who acts to head off the persecution of Buddhists, and his actions are reportedly effective:

恭宗言雖不用，然猶緩宣詔書，遠近皆豫聞知，得各為計。四方沙門，多亡匿獲免，在京邑者，亦蒙全濟。金銀寶像及諸經論，大得秘藏。而土木宮塔，聲教所及，莫不畢毀矣。³⁷

Gongzong, though his words had not been heeded, nevertheless tempered the text of the edict that was disseminated, and near and far all heard and knew of it in advance and were able to scheme. Most of the śramaṇas in all the four directions fled or hid and thereby escaped capture, and all those in the capital were saved. Much of the gold, silver, jewels, and images, as well as the sutras and treatises, could be secretly stored away. But the buildings and stupas in those places reached by the proclamation were all utterly ruined.

The treatise records that the suppression of Buddhism continued throughout the duration of Tuoba Tao's rule, but its practitioners cautiously continued to practice, though not openly in the capital. Moreover, in the aftermath of the execution of his advisor Cui Hao, Tuoba Tao comes to feel remorse over his persecution of Buddhism:

浩既誅死，帝頗悔之。業已行，難中修復。恭宗潛欲興之，未敢言也。佛淪廢終帝世，積七八年。然禁稍寬弛，篤信之家，得密奉事，沙門專至者，猶竊法服誦習焉。唯不得顯行於京都矣。³⁸

³⁷ *Wei shu* 114.3035.

³⁸ *Wei shu* 114.3035.

After [Cui] Hao's execution, the emperor was somewhat regretful. The actions were already under way though, and it would be difficult to rectify and restore [the situation]. Gongzong covertly desired to restore [Buddhism], but he did not yet dare to speak it. The suppression of Buddhism lasted through the [remainder] of the emperor's reign, altogether seven or eight years. However, the prohibition gradually became more lenient, and the households of staunch believers were able to practice in secret, and the more extreme śramaṇas still clandestinely wore their monk robes and chanted. It was only that they could not practice openly in the capital.

Cui Hao, the most influential proponent of the policy to suppress Buddhism, had been implicated in the “Guo shu” (國書) incident, which led to the execution of his whole clan (the Cui clan of Qinghe 清河) in 450 C.E. (Cui Hao and others had compiled a history of the Tuoba and the Northern Wei that, after being inscribed on stelae erected near the capital for all to read, caused a furor for allegedly exposing some very unflattering aspects.³⁹) The Daoist monk Kou Qianzhi had also died, two years prior, in 448 C.E. According to this account, then, Tuoba Tao is presented as rather isolated by this time; his conviction that Buddhism should be proscribed is apparently beginning to waver without the continual urging on of his trusted advisor, Cui Hao. Nevertheless, the persecution of Buddhists had, by this account, taken on a momentum all its own, and would have been very difficult to rein in.

Tuoba Huang 拓跋晃, who would be posthumously honored as Emperor Jingmu (景穆帝), never actually acceded to the throne, even though he had been named the crown prince early in the reign of his father Tuoba Tao, according to the *Wei shu*. The account of Tuoba Huang in the *Wei shu* annals states that he died of terror caused by the eunuch Zong Ai 宗愛, in 451 C.E. (Zong Ai would assassinate Huang's father, the

³⁹ Cui Hao's biography is found in *Wei shu* 47, and he also has a biography in the *Beishi*.

emperor, the following year, in 452 C.E.) It was Tuoba Jun 拓跋濬 (posthumous name Emperor Wencheng 文成) who would succeed Tuoba Tao, taking power not long after the latter's death. Tuoba Jun bestowed upon his father Tuoba Huang the imperial name Emperor Jingmu, and moved to honor his predecessor in other important ways, most consequentially through his restoration of Buddhism.

Reign of Tuoba Jun (Emperor Gaozong)

The treatise records an edict by Tuoba Jun (Emperor Gaozong) that provides for the restoration of Buddhism, which he proclaims upon his accession to power in 452 C.E. In a response to Shizu's rhetoric that asserted a fundamental conflict between Buddhism and the Way of kings, Gaozong lays out a way to reconcile the two:

高宗踐極，下詔曰：「夫為帝王者，必祇奉明靈，顯彰仁道，其能惠著生民，濟益群品者，雖在古昔，猶序其風烈。是以春秋嘉崇明之禮，祭典載功施之族。況釋迦如來功濟大千，惠流塵境，等生死者歎其達觀，覽文義者，貴其妙明，助王政之禁律，益仁智之善性，排斥群邪，開演正覺。故前代已來，莫不崇尚，亦我國家常所尊事也。⁴⁰

Gaozong acceded the throne, and sent down an edict that stated, “Kings and emperors must reverently serve the illustrious spirits and manifest the way of humaneness. Those who were able to bestow kindness on the people and save the multitudinous beings, even though it was in antiquity, still the [records of] their meritorious deeds are laid out. And so it is that the *Spring and Autumn Annals* praised the veneration of the rites, and the sacrificial codes recorded those who achieved merit. So much more so, then, is the Śākya Tathāgata, whose merits save the Grand Chiliocosm⁴¹ and whose compassion flows out over all the dusty regions. Those who [weigh] life and death as equal admire his far-reaching vision; those who peruse the writings and doctrines value his wondrous clarity. [Buddhist teaching] assists the prohibitions and statutes of kingly governance, and enriches

⁴⁰ *Wei shu* 114.3035.

⁴¹ Hurvitz, “Wei Shou Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism,” 70n4: “Grand Chiliocosm” is the translation for the 三千大千世界, and may be understood as “the world.”

the good nature of humaneness and wisdom. [It] drives away the many evils, and opens up the right perception. Therefore, since former ages, none has not held [it] in high esteem. Even in our own state, it has ever been revered and served.

This edict deftly intertwines the history of moral governance with the originator of Buddhism, the Buddha Śākyamuni. Rather than posing an intellectual and moral challenge to the “Way of kings,” Buddhism is a support for government, the edict argues. Śākyamuni Tāthagata is cast as an exemplary ruler, whose compassion facilitates the beneficent guidance of the people and orderly government. If we think of the records of ancient rulers as a textual inheritance, the teachings of Buddhism are then only the most recently written chapter in that book, one that happens to surpass the achievements of all its precursors.

The edict next confronts the experience of Buddhism during the reign of Tuoba Tao, Shizu, who represents the striking exception to the assertion that “even in our own state, [Buddhism] has ever been revered and served.” Essentially, the persecution of Buddhism appears to have been the consequence of a few deceitful advisors, compounded by a misunderstanding between the emperor and certain officials in issuing the punishment of those advisors:

世祖太武皇帝，開廣邊荒，德澤遐及。沙門道士善行純誠，惠始之倫，無遠不至，風義相感，往往如林。夫山海之深，怪物多有，姦淫之徒，得容假託，講寺之中，致有兇黨。是以先朝因其瑕釁，戮其有罪。有司失旨，一切禁斷。景穆皇帝每為慨然，值軍國多事，未遑修復。⁴²

Shizu, Emperor Taiwu, opened up and expanded the wilderness at the borders, and his virtue and favor reached far. The śramaṇas and priests, those of good conduct and who were pure and sincere, such as Hui Shi, regardless of the distance, all came [to the emperor]. Their moral character was mutually felt, and

⁴² *Wei shu* 114.3035–3036.

they became [numerous] as a grove. Yet just as in the depths of mountains and seas there are many strange creatures, [within the Buddhist clergy], the followers of treachery and immorality were allowed to falsely present themselves, and they caused evil factions to arise in the lecture halls within the temples. Thus the court of our predecessor, because of such excesses, sought to execute those culpable. The officers, mistaking the emperor's meaning, prohibited and put a cease to everything. Emperor Jingmu⁴³ long grieved over this, but as he faced the many affairs of the army and state, he did not have the time to rectify and recover [the situation].

Finally, the edict proclaims the restoration of Buddhism throughout the land:

朕承洪緒，君臨萬邦，思述先志，以隆斯道。今制諸州郡縣，於眾居之所，各聽建佛圖一區，任其財用，不制會限。其好樂道法，欲為沙門，不問長幼，出於良家，性行素篤，無諸嫌穢，鄉里所明者，聽其出家。率大州五十，小州四十人，其郡遙遠臺者十人。各當局分，皆足以化惡就善，播揚道教也。
。」⁴⁴

I have now received the great succession, and reign over the myriad lands. I wish to express the intent of my predecessor, and thereby [allow] the Way to flourish. We now institute that each of the various administrative units, in all the places where the multitudes dwell, shall permit the building of one Buddhist stupa in each area, and to allow for the expense, setting no limit on it. Those who love the Way and the Law and who desire to become śramaṇas, whether they are old or young, if they come from a good family, and their nature and conduct have always been sincere, if they are not suspected of indecency, and if they are vouched for by their native villages, shall be permitted to leave their families. As a rule, [there shall be] fifty in the large provinces, forty in the small provinces, and ten in prefectures far from the capital. If each in this way is sorted into one of the three categories, all should suffice to transform the evil into good and [be able to] disseminate the Way and the doctrines.

The proclamation of Buddhism's restoration by Gaozong is represented as his giving voice to the wishes of his father, who was hampered from doing so in his own time.

Naturally, culpability for the persecution of Buddhism is carefully not placed directly on

⁴³ As mentioned above, Emperor Jingmu refers to Tuoba Huang, who had been named heir apparent but never came to power (as he predeceased his father, Tuoba Tao). Known as Gongzong, he was posthumously honored with the emperor name Jingmu by his son, Tuoba Jun.

⁴⁴ *Wei shu* 114.3036.

Emperor Shizu, but rather is presented as having all been an unfortunate misunderstanding. The restoration is recorded as spectacularly effective: as soon as word of the edict reaches everywhere within the territory, “morning had not stretched into evening by the time that all of the long-ruined Buddhist temples were restored, and the Buddha images, scriptures, and treatises were all once again allowed to appear openly” (天下承風，朝不及夕，往時所毀圖寺，仍還修矣。佛像經論，皆復得顯。).⁴⁵ On the day the proclamation is promulgated, Gaozong is portrayed as personally shaving off the hair of five śramaṇas in the capital including Shixian 師賢, who would become *Daoren tong* 道人統, the Supervisor of Buddhists.⁴⁶

Conclusion

The history of Buddhism in the early reigns of the Northern Wei emperors traces a broad arc from tolerance to prohibition through to restoration. Tuoba Tao’s proscription of Buddhism in the mid-fifth century was motivated not only by his suspicions toward the loyalty of Buddhists to the state; according to his edict, he claimed that Buddhism was fundamentally in conflict with the Chinese political order (the Way of kings). Tuoba Tao was thus positioning himself as the defender of a native (nine-provinces based) imperial tradition against the threat of a foreign religion. This posture belies the somewhat facile assumption that Buddhism held an appeal for the non-Chinese Tuoba precisely by virtue

⁴⁵ *Wei shu* 114.3036.

⁴⁶ See *Wei shu* 114.3036 for the account of the monk Shi Xian: 京師沙門師賢，本罽賓國王種人，少入道，東遊涼城，涼平赴京。罷佛法時，師賢假為醫術還俗，而守道不改。於修復日，即反沙門，其同輩五人。帝乃親為下髮。師賢仍為道人統。

of its foreignness. Tuoba Jun, the successor to Tuoba Tao, in proclaiming the restoration of Buddhism in the Northern Wei state, reconciled Buddhism with the Way of kings, craftily intertwining religious and political authority by declaring that the Buddha Śākyamuni was himself the paragon of imperial authority—the Tāthagata. It should be emphasized that Tuoba Jun’s argument in favor of Buddhism in the Northern Wei was never premised on the idea that both Buddhism and the Northern Wei were foreign, and thus shared a natural affinity. The early Northern Wei rulers, according to the *Wei shu*, never would have acknowledged their status as foreign, in spite of their remote origins.

Tuoba Jun’s patronage of Buddhism set the stage for the flourishing of Buddhism throughout the latter decades of Northern Wei rule. Moreover, his revisionist move to enshrine Tuoba Tao as one of the five early emperors honored with a Śākyamuni statue sought to establish the early history of the Northern Wei as having always been supportive of Buddhism and its ideals, ever since its founding.

Nearly a century after the founding of the Northern Wei, state patronage of Buddhism would reach its apogee with the construction of the Longmen Buddhist caves outside of the capital Luoyang, in 493 C.E. Indeed, it was under the Northern Wei emperor with whom the process of “Sinification” is most strongly associated, Emperor Xiaowen, that Buddhism reached its highest status. Following the disintegration of the Northern Wei into the Eastern and Western Wei, and into their respective successor states the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou, Buddhism continued to flourish with support from the state and wealthy elites. Wei Shou, writing his “Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism” for the *Wei shu* during the Northern Qi, was of course well aware of such developments. His historiography of Buddhism during the early reigns of the Northern Wei is therefore

understandably teleological, yet it also bears no sign of an attempt to conceal the account of Buddhism's persecution under Tuoba Tao, even while it gestures toward a rationalization.

Epilogue

According to an account in the *Wei shu* “Ritual Treatise,” during the Taiping Zhenjun reign period (440–451 C.E.), an emissary from the state of Wuluohou¹ arrived at the Northern Wei capital with a deeply intriguing message for the Tuoba emperor. The record follows:

魏先之居幽都也，鑿石為祖宗之廟於烏洛侯國西北。自後南遷，其地隔遠。真君中，烏洛侯國遣使朝獻，云石廟如故，民常祈請，有神驗焉。²

The place of the Wei ancestors was Youdu, and [they] carved a temple to the ancestors out of the stone, in the northwest of Wuluohou state. Since that time, they moved southward, and became separated and distanced from their [original] land. In the reign period of [Taiping] Zhenjun, the state of Wuluohou dispatched an envoy to bring tribute to the [Tuoba], and [he] said that the stone temple was still [there] as before, the people often worshipped and supplicated there, and there were answers from the deity.

The account indicates that the Tuoba had been unaware of this ancestral temple prior to the envoy’s appearance at the Tuoba capital, and later that year the emperor reportedly sent an official to this “stone chamber” (*shishi* 石室), who performed sacrifices at the site:

¹ *Wei shu* 100, which includes an account of Wuluohou, contains descriptions of a total of nine lands that collectively comprise the lands of the “Yi Di” (Yi Di 夷狄), in the term used by the historian. See *Wei shu* 100.2224: 烏洛侯國，在地豆于之北，去代都四千五百餘里。其土下濕，多霧氣而寒，民冬則穿地為室，夏則隨原阜畜牧。多豕，有穀麥。無大君長，部落莫弗皆世為之。其俗繩髮，衣服，以珠為飾。民尚勇，不為姦竊，故慢藏野積而無寇盜。好獵射。樂有箜篌，木槽革面而施九弦。其國西北有完水，東北流合于難水，其地小水皆注於難，東入于海。又西北二十日行有于已尼大水，所謂北海也。世祖真君四年來朝，稱其國西北有國家先帝舊墟，石室南北九十步，東西四十步，高七十尺，室有神靈，民多祈請。世祖遣中書侍郎李敞告祭焉，刊祝文於室之壁而還。

² *Wei shu* 108a.2738–2739.

其歲，遣中書侍郎李敞詣石室，告祭天地，以皇祖先妣配。

That year, the *zhongshu shilang* (vice president of the Secretariat) Li Chang reached the stone chamber, and sacrificed to heaven and earth, with the deceased mother of the august ancestor impersonating.

The *Wei shu* account preserves a record of the invocation spoken at the temple, which humbly acknowledges the beneficence of the Tuoba ancestors, and prays for their continued aid and blessings of longevity upon the imperial lineage.³

Following the completion of the sacrifices, the Tuoba officials fell a birch tree and erect it on the site, and arrange the corpses of the sacrificial animals before returning to the capital. The anecdote then closes with the following coda:

後所立樺木生長成林，其民益神奉之。咸謂魏國感靈祇之應也。

石室南距代京可四千餘里。⁴

Later, at the place where the birch had been erected, it grew into a forest, and the people increased their worship of the deities there. They all said that it was a sign of the Wei state affecting the gods of heaven and earth.

The stone chamber was perhaps more than four thousand *li* distant from the Dai capital in the south.

The significance of this anecdote lies in the efforts by the Tuoba emperor (Tuoba Tao, or Shizu, Emperor Taiwu) to recover knowledge of the Tuoba ancestry from the distant past. The passage describing the Wuluohou envoy's startling account reads almost apologetically, as if the historiographer regrets the loss of any more than a vague impression of Tuoba ancestral origins. As has been pointed out by recent scholars, this

³ *Wei shu* 108a.2738–2739. See below for the complete text and translation of the invocation.

⁴ *Wei shu* 108a.2738–2739.

passage merely indicates that Emperor Taiwu believed the *shishi* to be a Tuoba ancestral temple; it does little to actually prove the veracity of such an idea.⁵

More than fifteen hundred years elapsed since the recorded date of this journey to the Tuoba ancestral temple, and then archaeologists made an astounding discovery: an inscription carved in the stone of Gaxian Cave within the Greater Xing'an Mountains of northeastern Inner Mongolia. Remarkably, the invocation in the inscribed text is nearly identical to that in the received *Wei shu* text, with only slight discrepancies. There is, however, one stark difference: the inscription preserves words eulogizing the ancestors as *kehan* (*qaghan* 可寒) and *kedun* (*qatun* 可敦), terms that both mean khan.⁶ Of course, whether the Tuoba in the fifth century C.E. actually referred to their ancestral rulers as khans, or whether this invocation employs archaizing language within such a solemn ritual context, cannot be known.

For the purpose of comparison, I have excerpted in full the text of the invocation from each source, the first from the *Wei shu* “Ritual Treatise,” and the second from the Xianbei *shishi* inscription:

天子燾謹遣敝等用駿足、一元大武敢昭告于皇天之靈。自啟闢之初，祐我皇祖，于彼土田。歷載億年，聿來南遷。惟祖惟父，光宅中原。克翦凶醜，拓定四邊。冲人纂業，德聲弗彰。豈謂幽遐，稽首來王。具知舊廟，弗毀弗亡。悠悠之懷，希仰餘光。王業之興，起自皇祖。

⁵ See, e.g., Kang Le, *Cong xijiao dao nanjiao*, 5.

⁶ The terms (for male and female khan) appear in the final lines of the inscription, as the named ancestors participating in the sacrifices. For discussion of this discovery (which occurred in 1980) and its implications, see Kang Le, *Cong xijiao dao nanjiao*, 1–10; Zhang Jihao, *Cong Tuoba dao Bei Wei*, 127–130; and Holcombe, “The Xianbei in Chinese History,” 15–16.

綿綿瓜瓞⁷，時惟多祜。敢以丕功，配饗于天。子子孫孫，福祿永延。
8

The Son of Heaven [Tuoba] Tao solemnly sent [Li] Chang and others with fine horses and the ceremonial bull⁹ to boldly proclaim to the spirits of august heaven.

Since the time of the beginning, [heaven] assisted our august ancestors in their lands. Throughout the hundred million years, [they] moved southward. Our ancestors, our forebears expansively occupied the central plains. [They] overcame and annihilated the evil ones, pacifying the four borderlands. I (the emperor) succeeded in the (imperial) enterprise, yet (my) reputed moral virtue is not manifest. Thus from [this place] considered deep and remote, [the envoy] came to pay his respects. [We then] came to know all about the old temple, and that it was neither ruined nor destroyed.

Thus yearningly of heart, [we] hopefully upturn our faces toward the brilliance [of the ancestors]. The flourishing of the imperial enterprise, it arose from the august ancestors. Spreading and spreading were the gourds, down through time [receiving] the many blessings. [We] boldly and with a great effort, accompany the sacrifices to heaven. [Our] sons, sons and grandsons, grandsons, [may their] fortune and ranks ever extend.

維太平真君四年癸未歲七月廿五日
天子臣燾使謁者僕射庫六官中書侍郎李敞傳瓮用駿足一元大武柔毛之
牲敢昭告于皇天之神。
啟闢之初，祐我皇祖于彼土田，
歷載億年，聿來南遷，應受多福。
光宅中原，惟祖惟父拓定四邊慶流后胤延及。
冲人闡揚玄風，增構崇堂，剋揃凶醜，威[威]¹⁰暨四荒。
幽人忘遐，稽首來王始，聞舊墟爰在彼方。
悠悠之懷，希仰餘光。
王業之興，起自皇祖，綿綿瓜瓞時惟多祜。

⁷ This phrase cites the first line of “Mian” in *Shi jing* (*Mao Shi* 237): 綿綿瓜瓞，民之初生。

⁸ *Wei shu* 108a.2738–2739.

⁹ The term *yi yuan da wu* refers to the bull used in imperial sacrifices to the ancestors. It appears in *Li ji*, “Dianli xia”: 凡祭宗廟之禮，牛曰一元大武，豕曰剛鬣，豚曰腍肥，羊曰柔毛。

¹⁰ These four characters were apparently somewhat blurry, according to the original archaeological report on the discovery of the Xianbei *shishi* by Mi Wenping, “Xianbei shishi de faxian yu chubu yanjiu,” 3. Kang Le has read the character *wei* (威) as *xian* (咸) in his transcription. See Kang Le, *Cong xijiao dao nanjiao*, 4.

歸以謝施推以配天。子子孫孫福祿永延。
荐于
皇皇帝天
皇皇后土
皇祖先可寒配
皇祖先可敦配
尚饗。¹¹

In the fourth year of Taiping zhenjun (443 C.E.) a *gui wei* year, on the twenty-fifth day of the seventh month, the Son of Heaven (the Emperor) Tao sent the *yezhe puye* (announcer of imperial decrees) Kunuguan,¹² and the *zhongshu shilang* (vice president of the Secretariat) Li Chang Fu Nou with fine horses and with the ceremonial bull and the soft-haired sacrificial animal (the ceremonial goat)¹³ to boldly proclaim to the spirits of the august ancestors.

Since the time of the beginning, [heaven] has assisted our august ancestors in those lands. Throughout the hundred million years, [our ancestors] moved southward, and received many fortunes, expansively occupying the central plains. Our ancestors, our fathers pacified the four borderlands. Their moral virtue flowed down through their descendents and extended to [the emperor]. The emperor, expounding and propagating the dark wind, made lofty the worship hall, annihilated the evil ones and his might reached throughout the four wildernesses. The people of You [had become] forgotten and remote, but since [the envoy] came to pay his respects to the emperor, [we] heard that the old ruins were still in this place.

Thus yearningly of heart, [we] hopefully upturn our faces toward the brilliance [of the ancestors]. The flourishing of the imperial enterprise, it arose from the august ancestors. Spreading and spreading were the gourds, down through time [receiving] many blessings. [We now] have returned to express gratitude and rebuild [the cave] to perform sacrifices through the ancestors. [Our] sons, sons and grandsons, grandsons, [may their] fortune and ranks ever extend.

Presenting the sacrifices with:
August emperor of heaven
August empress of earth

¹¹ Text of the inscription is cited from the original archaeological report on the Xianbei *shishi* by Mi Wenping, “Xianbei shishi de faxian yu chubu yanjiu.” See also Kang Le, *Cong xijiao dao nanjiao*, 3–4. A record on the carving of the inscription at the site is also found in *Wei shu* 100.2224. See note 1 above.

¹² Mi Wenping glosses this unusual surname as Kunuguan (庫禱官), reading *nu* (禱) for *liu* (六). The surname also appears in the *Wei shu* “Guan shi zhi.”

¹³ See note 9 above.

August ancestor *kehan* impersonating
August ancestor *kedun* impersonating
Please accept these sacrifices.

Reading the invocation, it seems like an effort to make amends for a dimmed memory of Tuoba origins and ancestors. Even at this moment in the mid-fifth century, Tuoba knowledge of their past had become remote and obscured, and according to the anecdote, word of this ancient land with its temple dedicated to the Tuoba ancestors had to come from a traveling envoy of a distant state. The fact that the textual and material records on this experience corroborate each other means that the journey to sacrifice at this ancestral temple is likely to actually have taken place. As for the accounts of all the other imperial sacrifices throughout the early Northern Wei, however, we can only rely on the textual source of the *Wei shu* to inform our understanding and shape our interpretation.

If the invocation admits that memory of the past is imperfect, then the historiography that records such an experience is exponentially so. The discovery of the fifth-century inscription in the Tuoba *shishi*, with its significant differences from the recorded text from more than a century later, serves as a reminder that historiography is only ever a representation, written at a moment that holds its own impulses to interpret the past. Mindful of such mediation, we must nevertheless recognize that the extant historiography on the early Tuoba and the Northern Wei imperial state is deeply layered and complex. I hope to have proven in this dissertation that *Wei shu* historiography contains a plurality of coexisting accounts of Tuoba origins and ancestors, as well as divergent representations of imperial and cultural authority in the early Northern Wei state. It is the productive act of close reading across this multiplicity of perspectives in

the *Wei shu* that leads to a meaningful understanding of the cultural and political tensions that attended the founding of the Northern Wei.

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