

THE SCREED OF A HUMBLED EMPIRE: THE *XIN TANGSHU*'S PROLEGOMENA ON THE TÜRKIS

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Ban Gu said, "If they [the pastoral nomads] come seeking after righteousness, then [we should] receive them with courtesy and deference." What? Courtesy and deference are for associating with gentlemen, not for receiving birds of prey, beasts, and savages. If our fine and beautiful things are scattered abroad, then their savage breasts are brought to bear, and if their savage breasts are brought to bear, then their aggression and plunder commences ... The house of Han grew accustomed to trifling with the overbearing caitiffs and caused them to delight in the beautiful women of Yan and Zhao, take pleasure in the curios of the Provisioner,¹ and be clothed in elegant twilled silk and silken gauze. If [these things were] provided, their demands were increased; if [these things were] cut off, their resentment was incurred. This was [like] sating ravenous wolves with fine meats, and it only indulged and aggravated their hankering for the chase ... They are like unto all manner of insects, reptiles, snakes, and lizards. How could we "receive them with courtesy and deference"?" (XTS 215A.6025)

The *Xin Tangshu* ("New Tang [Dynasty] History"), a work compiled in large part by the Chinese Song dynasty (A.D. 960–1279) Neo-Confucian literatus Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), contains some material on the Türks (called *Tujue* by the Chinese). In his prolegomena to this material, Ouyang Xiu launches into a shrill anti-nomad tirade that betrays his emotional excess and ideological prejudices against the Türks, Xiongnu, and other nomadic peoples who historically inhabited the steppe regions north of China. In addition, Ouyang's style of historical writing valued conveyance of moral principles over dispassionate description. The *Xin Tangshu*'s historical coverage of the Türks is therefore quite suspect and should be used with caution. Other Chinese-language works on Tang history and the Türks (among them the *Jiu Tangshu*, or "Old Tang History" and others) are more reliable and detailed. But since the *Xin Tangshu* contains some information not found in other texts, it would be a mistake for Turkologists to neglect it altogether. Informed caution, not uninformed avoidance, is the correct approach to using the *Xin Tangshu*.

Key words: Buddhism, *Cefu Yuanghu*, diplomatic intermarriage (*heqin*), Emperor Wudi (r. 140–87 B.C.), Kitan, Neo-Confucianism, Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), Treaty of Shanyuan (1005), Türks, *Xin Tangshu*.

Chinese dynasties: Zhou (1122?–256 B.C.), Qin (221–206 B.C.), Han (202 B.C.–A.D. 220), Sui (A.D. 581–618), Tang (A.D. 617–907), Song (A.D. 960–1279), Five Dynasties period (907–960).

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¹ *Taiguan*, a Qin and Han government official in charge of preparing meals for the imperial family members and court officials. See Hucker (1985, p. 479, entry 6185.1).

Upon reading this shrill and dehumanising tirade for the first time, one might be tempted to dismiss it out of hand as irresponsible and its author as sloppy and emotional. But an inquiry into the identity and ideology of the writer indicates that he subscribed to a fairly coherent philosophy of historical writing, if not a disciplined and rational methodology that gave due regard to historical facts.

This passage is part of the prolegomena in the section on the Türks (*Tujue*) in the *Xin Tangshu*² (“New Tang History”), an important historical source on China’s Tang dynasty (A.D. 617–907) written in the 11th century, during the Song dynasty (A.D. 960–1279). The *Xin Tangshu* was compiled by Neo-Confucian scholars under the general editorship of Ouyang Xiu³ (or Ou-yang Hsiu, 1007–1072), one of the best-known of the 11th-century Chinese literati⁴ and a doughty Chinese chauvinist and Neo-Confucian crusader who abominated everything foreign and non-Chinese, whether people (i.e., pastoral nomads), religion (i.e., Buddhism), or culture.

“The barbarians are menaces to China and always have been” – the prolegomena begin with a discernible note of exasperation and resignation. They then launch into a fairly incoherent and discordant historical review of China’s relations with its pastoral nomadic neighbours:

In former generations, historians of various abilities discussed them. During the heyday of the Tang dynasty, when the power of the barbarians alternately rose and fell, those among them who presumed to equality with China were four: Türks, Tibetans, Uighurs, and Yunnan (Nanzhao, on which see Backus 1981). During these times, suggestions presented by officialdom [for dealing with the barbarians] filled the court; some were heeded and some were tabled, [but all were] laid out in an orderly manner to see. (XTS 215A.6023)

But from Tang topics the prolegomena immediately jump back to high antiquity. Consistent with the general Sino-Confucian tendency to idealise ancient times in glowing terms and to regard the more recent past far more negatively, the prolegomena argue that the Zhou (1122?–256 B.C.) had the best policy for dealing with the “barbarians”, while by the time the Han dynasty (202 B.C.–A.D. 220) rolled around, things were so bad that there was “no policy at all”:

One Liu Kuang⁵ held that ... the Zhou dynasty had the best policy [for dealing with the barbarians], the Qin dynasty⁶ had the next best policy, while the Han dynasty had no policy at all. What did he [Liu Kuang] mean by this? [He meant that] beyond the desolate zones, where [China’s] cultural education does not extend, [the Zhou] neither wearied its troops in response to their unruliness nor let down its defences in response to their surrenders. [The Zhou] rigorously maintained its

² Hereafter abbreviated XTS.

³ Biography SS 319.10375-81.

⁴ On Ouyang Xiu see Liu (1967).

⁵ No biographical information found.

⁶ 221–206 B.C.

precautions and impeded [the barbarians'] movements and assemblies, so that plunder was impossible for them and submitting [to China] was not permitted them. "Favouring this China of ours to pacify the four quarters": this was the Zhou way. Hence [Liu Kuang] said that the Zhou had the best policy. (XTS 215A.6023)

Defensive and wall-building strategies were the next best measures, the prolegomena maintained, so the Qin had the next best programme.

The *Yijing*⁷ says, "The princes and marquises made installations at strategic passes to solidify their states." Building walled fortifications and repairing defensive frontiers are the means of "making installations at strategic passes." Viscount Jian of Zhao began a walled fortification as a precaution against the barbarians. The Yan and Qin also built walled fortifications to delineate China and foreign [areas]. But they paid so much attention to arranging walls and moats that their states were destroyed even though their walls were completed, and the people blamed [them for] this ... Hence Liu Kuang said that the Qin had the next best policy. (XTS 215A.6023-24)

The prolegomena reserve their greatest wrath for the Han dynasty and its practice of diplomatic intermarriage (*heqin*), or the marrying of Chinese princesses to foreign leaders in order to cement relations. This is of course startlingly ironic in view of the Han's eventual replacement of the intermarriage system with the tribute system during the reign of Emperor Xuan (r. 73–49 B.C.).

The Han gave girls of the imperial family in marriage to the Xiongnu, but Emperor Gaozu⁸ said this could not stop Xiongnu unruliness ... Even though [the Han] knew that intermarriage was not a plan for long-lasting peace, it still implemented it because, as a newly established empire, [it wanted] only to have respite for a while from its calamities. By the time of Emperor Wudi,⁹ China had long been at peace and barbarian raids were less frequent; now was the time for thinning them out and cutting them off. From this time on China was worn down and drained of wealth as year after year of fighting ensued ... Even so, by the times of the Han Emperors Zhao¹⁰ and Xuan,¹¹ the warriors were well trained and the reconnaissance patrols were keen and sharp, while the Xiongnu were in decline and backing away ... [but the Han] still repeated ... the mistake of overextending itself, depleting the treasury of 200,700,000 every year to supply the northwest. (XTS 215A.6024)

⁷ Often known in the West as the *I-ching* or *Book of Changes*.

⁸ Liu Bang; r. 202–194 B.C.

⁹ R. 140–86 B.C.

¹⁰ R. 86–73 B.C.

¹¹ R. 73–48 B.C.

The budgetary depletions seem to have been bad enough in the minds of the writers, but what they really objected to was intermarriage. Such objections were couched in almost hysterical prose and were further sensationalised by the persistent cultural canard in China that the northern barbarians were an incestuous and libidinous lot:

Fine girls from the imperial clan were married in yurts, and good palace men were consigned to the desert. Sir, offering men, girls, and local products as tribute is the conduct of vassals and servants! ... *Arrivals* from the desolate zones are announced, but there should be no talk of [eminent Chinese] *going* there ... What are to make of the Son of Heaven, in his dignity, entering into alliance with the Xiongnu as “brothers”? of the emperor’s daughter, designated as such, being tamed as a shrew along with barbarian hags? of steamy mothers embracing their sons and [eminent Chinese] following their filthy customs? The difference between China and the barbarians is our distinction between father and son, man and woman. For the pleasant and seductive beauty [of these Chinese women] to be destroyed and curtailed among the alien brood – this is foul disgrace in the extreme! But none of the Han rulers or ministers were ashamed of it. (XTS 215A.6024)

Modern readers might regard the sentiments and hostility in this invective as xenophobic and even racist. Obviously the author of this harangue found diplomatic intermarriage with any foreign state patently offensive and unacceptable. This is somewhat ironic, to say the least, given that the Han, Sui (A.D. 581–618), and Tang, all dynasties that had been much more powerful and expansive than the Song, had conducted foreign relations within the framework of intermarriage. The Han had of course practised intermarriage diplomacy with the Xiongnu and other foreign peoples until the warlike Emperor Wudi (r. 140–87 B.C.) cancelled it in 133 B.C.¹² Subsequently the Sui and Tang revived intermarriage relations in their diplomacy with the Türks (see Jagchid – Symons 1989, pp. 39, 154).

The Song had a very humble territorial position, occupying only a fraction of the territory once controlled by the mighty Han and Tang dynasties. In 936, during the Five Dynasties period (907–960), a large portion of northern China known aggregately in Chinese as the “Sixteen Prefectures of Yan and Yun” was lost to the Kitans. The Song (960–1279) unified much of China by the end of the 10th century but never did succeed in recovering the Sixteen Prefectures, much to the chagrin of Chinese patriots throughout the dynasty. The Song launched two large-scale invasions into Kitan territory, once in 979 and again in 986, but both were beaten back. Ultimately with the conclusion of the Treaty of Shanyuan in 1005, the Song bought the Kitans off by agreeing to massive annual payments of silver and silk in exchange for lasting peace. With this treaty the Song recognised Kitan control over the Sixteen

¹² On the intermarriage system between the Han and the Xiongnu see Barfield (1989, pp. 45–48, 51–54, 59–60); Jagchid–Symons (1989, pp. 26–30, 55–65 *passim*); and Yü (1967, pp. 36–39, 41–43).

Prefectures but never did formally forsake its revanchist ambitions towards the territory. Territorial humiliation, frustrated nationalism, military effeminacy, and broken irredentist dreams characterised much of the Song period, and the dynasty was always acutely aware that it had fared worse and suffered more at the hands of the “barbarians” than the Han and Tang empires had.

The Song, however, steadfastly refused any suggestion from the Kitan during the negotiations at Shanyuan in 1004–1005 that the historical precedent of the inter-marriage system be revived for relations between the two states.¹³ It may have been that Song statesmen, already insecure about the masculine virility of their nations’ military and territory, chose to make themselves superior in power over the most obvious and immediately available candidate: their women. Such attitudes may have helped foster and promote the fetish of footbinding in Song times (Ebrey 1993, pp. 5–6, 37–43). Thus, any attempt by a foreign power to share or supplant their domination over women would have been unthinkable to them. Their fragile male egos could not bear the thought of Chinese women or any more Chinese territory being lost to the barbarians, so they finally agreed to pay annually for peace (Wright 1998, pp. 21–32). Song China parted with its money much more willingly than with its women or more of its territory.

But none of the foregoing history seems to have influenced the prolegomena’s condemnations of the Han’s policy towards the Xiongnu; the Han, it seems, deserved condemnation no matter what it did – as if parting with wealth were somehow less shameful than failing to win back historically Chinese territory!

...What we reaped from our labours in the fields and what we produced of silk and hemp was scattered tens of thousands of *li*¹⁴ abroad. The barbarians yearly grew more arrogant while China was daily more pressed. When they grew strong we exhausted our manpower to conquer them, and when they submitted we nurtured them as before; when they were afflicted they received our nurture, and when they were strong they attacked us from within. Is it not lamentable that China laboured in the service of the barbarians for a thousand years? ... Hence [Liu Kuang] said the Han had no policy at all... (XTS 215A.6024)

The conclusion of all this, never explicitly stated, is that by defending what was left of Chinese territory, the Song would somehow be approximating the idealised Qin policy:

Our Chinese infantrymen are at their best in obstructing strategic passes, while the caitiff cavalrymen are at their best on the flatlands. Let us resolutely stand on guard [at the strategic passes] and not dash off in pursuit of them or strive to chase them off. If they come, we

¹³ On the negotiations at Shanyuan see Schwarz-Schilling (1959, pp. 40–50) and Wright (1998).

¹⁴ The *li* was equivalent to approximately one-third of an English mile, or slightly more than half a kilometre.

should block strategic passes so that they cannot enter; if they withdraw, we should close strategic passes so that they cannot return. If they charge, we should use long two-pronged lances; if they approach, we should use robust crossbows. Let us not seek victory over them. (XTS 215A.6025)

What are we to make of such a scurrilous diatribe? The rants in these prolegomena actually tell us more about 11th-century Neo-Confucian attitudes and preoccupations than they do about the history of Sino-nomadic interaction or of China's actual strategic position vis-à-vis the Kitan Liao empire on its northern border during the 11th century. "Neo-Confucianism" is the label Western scholars have given the multifaceted revival of Confucian thought during the Song. Neo-Confucianism was not any one thing but a new constellation of ideas and concepts, most of which were more or less attributed to Confucius or like-minded thinkers in antiquity. What the new Confucianism did that the older Confucianism did not was to contemplate more rationally the nature of the cosmos and to propound some cosmological ideas, likely for the purpose of showing that Confucian thought could be as profound and comprehensive as any variety of Buddhism. The ultimate synthesiser of the various strands of Neo-Confucianism was Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi; 1130–1200), who has been compared with Thomas Aquinas.

One conviction shared by many Neo-Confucians was that Buddhism had harmed China and obscured its indigenous moral and philosophical heritage: the thought of Confucius. Several Neo-Confucian thinkers seem to have concluded that the other-worldliness and social irresponsibility of Buddhism was a major reason for the decline of Chinese civilisation and power, and they proposed a revived Confucianism as the corrective. More generally, the Neo-Confucian movement during Song China may be thought of as an energetic reassertion of the indigenous elements of Chinese civilisation.

Ouyang Xiu, like many of his contemporary Neo-Confucians, was distressed with what had befallen China since the decline of the Tang dynasty that set in during the 9th century. He seems to have concluded that elements of China's decline in greatness were traceable internally to Buddhism and externally to the "barbarians", or China's northern nomadic neighbours, and China's failure to come up with an effective foreign policy for dealing with them. He detested Buddhism because of its ideological heterodoxy, foreign origins, and his suspicions of it as an *imperium in imperio*. He attributed the penetration of Buddhism into China to a weakening of Chinese institutions: "This curse [Buddhism] has overspread the empire for a thousand years, and what can one man in one day do about it? The people are drunk with it, and it has entered the marrow of their bones; it is surely not to be overcome by eloquent talk. What, then, is to be done?" His solution was simple – revive and reformulate Confucianism so that it could compete with Buddhism (Wright 1959, pp. 88–89). Confucianism was the way of China's ancient sage-kings and should be re-enthroned in the hearts and minds of all Chinese:

The cult of Buddhism has plagued China for over a thousand years. In every age men with the vision to see through its falseness and the power to do something about it have all sought to drive it out ... It has been struck at but not wiped out, and indeed seems rather to grow more prevalent, until in the end it seems as if nothing could be done about it. But is the situation really hopeless, or is it simply that we have not used the proper methods?

When a doctor treats a disease, he tries to ascertain the origin of the sickness and heal the source of the infection. When sickness strikes a man, it takes advantage of the weak spot in his vitality to enter there. For this reason a good doctor does not attack the disease itself, but rather seeks to strengthen the patient's vitality, for when vitality has been restored, then the sickness will disappear as a natural consequence.

In like manner when one seeks to remedy the illnesses of the nation, one must ascertain their origins and heal the areas that are affected.

Buddha was a barbarian who was far removed from China and lived long ago ... But some two hundred years after the Three Dynasties had fallen into decay, when kingly rule ceased, and rites and righteousness were neglected, Buddhism came to China. It is clear then that Buddhism took advantage of this time of decay and neglect to come and plague us. This was how the illness was first contracted. And if we will but remedy this decay, revive what has fallen into disuse, and restore once again to the land kingly rule in its brilliance and rites and righteousness in their fullness, then although Buddhism continues to exist, it will have no hold upon our people. (de Bary 1960, p. 387)

Ouyang Xiu was, then, a xenophobe of the first magnitude. This fact alone should lead serious Turkologists to think twice before utilising the historical materials he wrote or revised. But it is not only his xenophobia that renders his historical writings suspect. His Neo-Confucian fanaticism led him into such egregious historiographical fallacy and error that even other Neo-Confucians disapproved of his historical writings. He achieved both fame and infamy in historical writing because of his literary revisions of major works on the Five Dynasties period (907–960) and the Tang dynasty. These revisions, known as the *Xin Wudaishi* ("New History of the Five Dynasties") and the *Xin Tangshu* ("New Tang History") respectively, did not fully supersede the works they were meant to replace, but they still had enough literary merit to be included alongside them in the Twenty-four Dynastic Histories (Liu 1967, pp. 105–106). His appointment in the 1050s to the task of revising the original history of the Tang (now called *Jiu Tangshu*, or "Old History of the Tang") had much to do with the intellectual politics of the day (Bol 1992, p. 194). In traditional Chinese histories, coverage of the barbarians is typically included in the biographies section. Another senior scholar named Song Qi was likely responsible for the biographies in the *Xin Tangshu*, while Ouyang Xiu concentrated on the other sections such as the basic annals and the monographs (Liu 1967, p. 106). But the convictions and

perspectives of the former were not significantly differently from Ouyang's, and the end result was that the *Xin Tangshu* reflected Ouyang's tastes and preferences for literary elegance, brevity and economy in detail and description, and (above all) the "praise and blame" historiography he imitated from the ancient Confucian classic *Spring and Autumn Annals*. This subjective and didactic approach to history involved sifting through detail to locate conveyable moral principles. As Ouyang Xiu's English-language biographer puts it:

Ou-yang's new history was chiefly interpretive. He paid little attention to events, many of which he dismissed as being inconsequential occurrences of a chaotic period or undesirable results of Buddhist influence, and as having little meaning or value. Instead, he concentrated on developing and applying the didactic concept of presenting facts selectively to support a moral judgement ... Some critics complained that these discussions and commentaries went too far in decrying the evils of the period. Ou-yang, in his own defense, maintained that the period was so utterly chaotic that only exclamations seemed called for. (Liu 1967, pp. 108–109)

Indeed, Ouyang Xiu's "moralistic judgements in history are open to criticism as overly simplistic and also his shortening of the elegant T'ang sources to suit his own taste, together with a number of errors of fact" (Liu 1976, p. 815). In other words, writing and history were for didacticism and moralisation; the actual facts themselves were mere secondary or tertiary considerations, often to be ignored or skimmed over altogether. "Interpretive history was acceptable", James T.C. Liu writes, "but Ou-yang's was too charged with emotional argument".

This emotionalism certainly shows up in the *Xin Tangshu*'s prolegomena to the section on the Türks. Ouyang Xiu's contemporaries did call him on his excessive emotionality and subjectivism when he was commenting on the contemporary moral and political scene in China, but nobody was likely to voice serious objections to his disparaging commentary on China's northern neighbours. (And since Ouyang Xiu may have written some of the biographies himself but not claimed credit for them out of deference to the seniority of Song Qi (Liu 1967, p. 106; Bol 1992, p. 194), we may be seeing the real, unrestrained Ouyang Xiu after all in these prolegomena.) Chinese scholars in premodern times more interested in history than in literature turned to the original works he wanted to revise and replace (Liu 1967, pp. 110–111), and one 11th- or 12th-century scholar named Wu Zhen was apparently so troubled by the *Xin Tangshu*'s numerous errors of fact that he wrote the *Xin Tangshu Jiumiu* ("Corrections of Errors in the *Xin Tangshu*"), a work of twenty chapters.¹⁵

Modern scholars have similar reservations about the *Xin Tangshu*. Denis Twitchett, the foremost historian of Tang China in the Western world, calls the treatment of basic historical annals in the *Xin Tangshu* "notorious" because they are "re-

¹⁵ See entry XTSJM in bibliography.

duced to such a skeletal form that they are of little use to a modern historian".¹⁶ Specialists in Chinese literature value Ouyang Xiu's rigorous prose above all else. They also esteem his poetry but admit that other Sung figures such as Zhu Xi and Sima Guang (Ssu-ma Kuang) surpass him as a thinker and historian (France 1986, p. 640).

To Ouyang Xiu and other like-minded Neo-Confucians, then, the most important consideration in historical writing was not accuracy but ideology; writing was for conveying "truth", not facts. Ouyang Xiu and his coterie of pugnacious and doctrinaire ideologues apparently felt they were privileged with moral licence to construct their own history and historical meanings regardless of the detailed descriptions in historical records. (Modern post-modernists take note!) This epistemological nihilism, when fermented with anxieties about the personal virility and national power of the Chinese and a deep-seated hostility towards all non-Chinese cultures, produced a strong subjectivist brew that intoxicated Ouyang Xiu and impaired his historical judgement.

It would, however, be a mistake to conclude that there is nothing in the *Xin Tangshu* worthy of serious attention by the Turkologist. There is material in the *Xin Tangshu* not found in the *Jiu Tangshu* (Hervouet 1978, p. 61), an observation that also holds, as Colin Mackerras has pointed out, for the Uighurs (Mackerras 1973, p. 2). Informed caution, and not uninformed avoidance, seem to be the operative advice for Turkologists with regard to the *Xin Tangshu*.

There are other examples of Song-era historical writing containing ideals that do not always match current historical realities, but they are not as historiographically irresponsible as those of Ouyang Xiu. Wang Gungwu has demonstrated that the prolegomena and the General Preface to the *Waichen bu* ("Foreign Subordinates" or "Outer Ministers Section") of the *Cefu Yuangui*, a Song historical work begun in 1005 and completed in 1013, conduct a credible dialogue between rhetoric and reality in the history of China's foreign relations:

The General Preface to the section on subordinates is an overview of relations between Chinese and non-Chinese which reflects the preoccupations of Sung officials after the Treaty of Shan-yüan. It tries hard to show the continuity from the ancient sage-kings to the Sung, but it also records new developments; it reaffirms the imperial rhetoric, but is also honest with data that does [sic] not fit the rhetoric and even contradicts [sic] it. (Wang 1983, p. 59)

But in the *Xin Tangshu* prolegomena to the section on the Türks, no such dialogue is attempted or even contemplated; they simply portray the northern barbarians as repulsive and warlike beasts. They credit only the Zhou – safely obscured in the idealised mists of antiquity – with an effective barbarian policy while lambasting the policies of the mighty Han and Tang empires. (One wonders if the author of these

¹⁶ Twitchett (1992, p. 201). Twitchett finds the *Jiu Tangshu* (the older Tang history, unmo-
lest by Ouyang Xiu) much more detailed and informative.

prolegomena paused even for a moment to contemplate the accomplishments and shortcomings of his *own* Song dynasty's barbarian policy.)

The fairly sophisticated prolegomena to the *Waichen bu* section of the *Cefu Yuangui* may well be characterised as "rhetoric", but the distorted, eviscerated content and emotive delivery in the prolegomena to the section on the Türks in the *Xin Tangshu* can only be regarded as bombast and rant born of territorial humiliation at the hands of the Kitans externally and overwrought Neo-Confucian fanaticism internally. They are the screed of a humbled and anxious Song empire.

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