

A Failed Peripheral Hegemonic State with a Limited Mandate of Heaven: Politico-Historical Reflections of a Survivor of the Southern Tang^{*}

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the concepts the *Diaoji litan* 釣磯立談 author, a survivor of the Southern Tang, developed to understand the history of the kingdom. It discusses his historical discourse and shows that one of its purposes was to secure a legitimate place in history for the Southern Tang. The author developed a crucial concept, the “peripheral hegemonic state” 偏霸, to comprehend its history. This concept contains an idea of a limited mandate of heaven, a geopolitical analysis of the Southern Tang situation, and a plan for the kingdom to compete with its rivals for the supreme political authority over all under heaven. With this concept, the *Diaoji* author implicitly disputes official historiography’s demeaning characterization of the Southern Tang as “pseudo” 偽, and founded upon “usurpation” 僭 and “thievery” 竊. He condemns the second ruler, Li Jing 李璟 (r. 943-961) and several ministers for abandoning the first ruler Li Bian’s 李昉 (r. 937-943) plan, thereby leading the kingdom astray. The work also stresses the need to recruit authentic Confucians to administer the government. As such, this article argues that the *Diaoji* should be understood as a politico-historical book of the late tenth century.

Key words: Southern Tang, survivor, *Diaoji litan* 釣磯立談, peripheral hegemonic state, mandate of heaven

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1. Introduction

Several years after the Song dynasty defeated the kingdom of the Southern Tang 南唐 (937-975) the author of *Diaoji litan* 釣磯立談 (hereafter, *Diaoji*) decided to write his book.¹ At that time, while everyone else celebrated the annexation of the kingdom into the newly established dynasty, the author grieved over its end. He lamented that along with the demise of the Southern Tang rulers' administration, their achievements would soon fade into oblivion. He thus recorded in his own hand some one hundred and twenty events that he considered could furnish memories of the subjugated kingdom. The *Diaoji* author, who lived on Southern Tang land after fleeing from the north in his youth in the mid-930s, did not have any official obligation to preserve its history because he never served its government. However, the fact that he did not share with others the joy of territorial unification under the Song, and that he could not bear to see the kingdom's history diminished, illustrates his emotional attachment to the Southern Tang. He expresses his "nostalgic thinking" 懷舊之思 for the conquered kingdom in his writing, and this makes the *Diaoji* a "survivor's book."²

Furthermore, the composition of this survivor's book also has a moral aspect. The *Diaoji* author asserts that a main purpose of his book is to offer a counter-account to the positions advanced in more official historiography. One of the events included in this book concerns the conflicts between Pan You 潘佑 (938-973) and Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916-991) – the last prime minister of the Southern Tang whom the Song recruited after capturing the kingdom's last ruler, Li Yu 李煜 (r. 961-978) and annexing its territory.

¹ Despite the continued efforts of bibliographers since the Southern Song, neither the identity of the author nor the completion date of the *Diaoji* have been determined. The most detailed information we have about the author is contained in the preface, where we learn that the author fled Shandong 山東 and crossed the Yangzi River to the south during the Qingtai 清泰 period (934-936). Settling in the Jiangbiao 江表 area, where the kingdoms of Wu 吳 (902-937) and Southern Tang ruled successively, he never worked in government and lived as a fisherman from the time of his arrival.

² Anonymous author 不著作者, *Diaoji litan*, in Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, Xu Hairong 徐海榮 and Xu Jijun 徐吉軍 (eds.), *Wudai shishu huibian* 五代史書彙編, vol. 9 (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004), p. 5002. Even though the compilers of this collection attribute this book to Shi Wen 史溫 (?-?), I disagree and will provide my reasons below.

Xu was ordered by Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 976-997) to write the *Jiangnan lu* 江南錄 so that the emperor might know the “previous matters” of the defeated kingdom. As a result, the *Diaoji* author suspected that Xu would use this opportunity to slander Pan and to avoid his own responsibility for the policies that caused the fall of the Southern Tang. The author felt compelled to put together what he knew to oppose those who were “sly and greedy” 詐貪, a slander which clearly refers to Xu. By doing so, he could ensure that when the official history of the Southern Tang was compiled, the “false and ridiculous” 謬悠 evaluations of people would not be uncritically accepted.³ Similar sentiments emerge again when he expresses his worry that Xu Xuan and other officials who surrendered to the Song would erase the brave deeds of officials who had been loyal to the Southern Tang in order to cover up their own controversial decisions. He reiterates that he will write down what he has witnessed and heard even though he is unable to write comprehensive biographies for these loyal officials due to a lack of source materials.⁴ To recount the merits of the deceased was thus, in his estimation, a moral action to defend virtue against shrewdness. He in fact characterized his writing as a morally charged action that all “virtuous persons” 仁人 would take.⁵

To achieve this moral goal and to express his emotional attachment to the Southern Tang, the *Diaoji* author took Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581) and Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) as his models. Admitting that the *Diaoji* author’s literary talent was far less than that of either Yu or Lu, the writer of the preface maintains that the author shares with them the intention to understand the reason for the failure of their own kingdoms.⁶ Lu, especially,

³ Ibid., p. 5019.

⁴ Ibid., p. 5022.

⁵ Ibid., p. 5019.

⁶ It would be prudent to provide some brief background information about the *Diaoji* author and the writer of the preface to the *Diaoji*. When the *Diaoji* author worked on his book, he had at least two immediate readers. One was the writer of the *Diaoji* preface and the other was this writer’s son. The preface reveals that the *Diaoji* author came to the south with the father of the preface’s writer (“accompanying my deceased father, the editor, to flee to Jiangbiao” 隨先校書避地江表). The description of the writer’s father in the preface closely matches with that of Shi Xubai 史虛白 (?-?) in the *Nantang jinshi* 南唐近事. See Zheng Wenbao 鄭文寶, *Nantang jinshi*, in Fu Xuancong, Xu Hairong and Xu Jijun (eds.), *Wudai shishu huibian*, vol. 9, pp. 5048-5049. Shi Xubai was also a native of Shandong. After arriving in the south, Shi briefly served in the office of editor 校書郎, a low-ranking position in the kingdom’s library, but did not advance further. He later gave up on his political career, enjoying a life of sightseeing and

as a member of a prestigious family in the Three Kingdoms state of Wu 吳 (229-280) wrote an “Essay on the Fall of a Kingdom” 辨亡論, discussing the decline and eventual end of Wu.⁷ Like Lu, the *Diaoji* author endeavored to scrutinize the historical process by which the once splendid kingdom collapsed. On the basis of his understanding of this historical process, he passed critical judgments on the rulers and their ministers, holding

drinking until he died sometime after 958. He called himself an “idle sojourner at fishing rock” 釣磯閒客 – the two characters 釣磯 (fishing rock) were used by the author to title his book. This indicates that the author might have lived with or close to Shi. After Shi’s death, the author resided in a thatched cottage to mourn him, which probably indicates that he considered Shi as his teacher. Shi Xubai’s eldest son, Shi Kun 史壘 (941-995), wrote the preface. Born in Jianye 建業 (modern Nanjing), Shi Kun was praised for his mastery of the classics. Shi Kun’s wife, Miss Xia 夏 (943-1022), was also educated in the classics. She guided their son Shi Wen through the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (*Classic of Filial Piety*) and the *Lunyu* 論語 (the *Analects of Confucius*) when he was only four. This family background provided Shi Wen with a solid classical training, and he eventually became a metropolitan graduate, *jinshi* 進士, during the Xianping 咸平 period (998-1003). See Zu Shiheng 祖士衡, “Song gu zeng dali pingshi Wuchang Shifujun muzhiming 宋故贈大理評事武昌史府君墓誌銘,” in Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 and Liu Lin 劉琳 (eds.), *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, vol. 17 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2006), pp. 376-378. According to the preface, before Shi Kun died, he had Shi Wen recite the whole text of the *Diaoji* in order to preserve the outline of Southern Tang history (使小子溫成誦於口·粗以存其梗概). It should be noted that Chen Shangjun 陳尚君 has discussed the problem of the *Diaoji*’s authorship and asserted that Shi Wen wrote the preface and compiled the book. See Chen Shangjun, “*Diaoji litan* zuozhe kao 釣磯立談作者考,” *Wen shi* 文史, 44 (1998), p. 182. I agree with him on most points. However, I think the preface was written by Shi Kun, because the writer calls Shi Xubai “late editor” 先校書, a respectful way to address one’s deceased father by his official title and because the writer calls Shi Wen “little child” 小子, a humble way to refer to one’s own son. Furthermore, although Shi Kun and Shi Wen had close relations with the *Diaoji* author, this book should not be attributed to either the older or the younger Shi even though Shi Wen should receive credit for compiling all the anecdotes and commentaries into a book. As an additional note about the identity of the *Diaoji* author, it could also be Shi Xubai’s son who was born in the north and came to the south with Shi. This speculation accords well with the available information. He could call Shi Xubai “deceased father,” he could mourn Shi Xubai after Shi died, and he could call Shi Wen “little child.” If this is the case, then the preface was probably written by the author himself – he used humble language to describe his literary works and talents at the end of the preface. One of the reviewers for this article suggested that since the epitaph by Zu Shiheng calls Shi Kun *meng* 孟 rather than *bo* 伯, this may indicate that Shi Kun is the eldest son of Shi Xubai’s second wife. See Ban Gu 班固, *Baihu tongde lun* 白虎通德論, *Sibu congkan chubian* 四部叢刊初編, vol. 89 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1919), *juan* 8, p. 12, for an explanation of the distinction between *meng* and *bo*. Chen Shangjun offers yet a third possibility regarding the identity of the *Diaoji* author: the author could be Shi Xubai’s younger brother, cousin, or nephew. No matter whether the *Diaoji* author is Shi Xubai’s family member or a disciple, it is certain that the author enjoyed a close relationship with the Shi family.

⁷ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, p. 5022.

them responsible for its prosperity and deterioration. His book, although full of emotional expressions and moral critiques, is also a work of intellectual effort. It is organized in an anecdote-commentary format, which includes a series of anecdotes, generally placed in chronological order, about the Southern Tang. Immediately after each anecdote, the author provides a commentary. The significance of the anecdote, which usually involves events, people, or both, is elaborated in the ensuing commentary. In turn, each commentary is substantiated by the anecdote that precedes it. The anecdotes do not connect to each other to form a coherent narrative about the kingdom; however, the commentaries do provide an explanatory framework and a set of interpretive concepts to understand the anecdotes. Taken together, the anecdotes and commentaries constitute a discourse on the rise and fall of the Southern Tang.⁸

As evidenced by the *Diaoji* author's intention to provide a counter-account to official historiography, his book was not written in a vacuum. Rather, there were several similar works on the history of the Southern Tang produced in the first several decades of the Song dynasty. On the side of official historiography, there were the *Jiangnan lu* and

⁸ A brief note as to the author's informant network will suffice here. Han Xizai 韓熙載 (902-970), a friend of Shi Xubai's, was a high-ranking official and prominent scholar of the Southern Tang. See Ma Ling 馬令, *Nantang shu* 南唐書, p. 5354; Lu You 陸游, *Nantang shu* 南唐書, p. 5520, both in Fu Xuancong, Xu Hairong and Xu Jijun (eds.), *Wudai shishu huibian*, vol. 9. Shi Xubai was married to a daughter of Song Chen 宋琛 (?-?), who was the magistrate of Jintan 金壇 (in modern Zhenjiang City, Jiangsu Province). Shi managed to arrange Shi Kun's marriage with Miss Xia, whose father Xia An 夏安 (?-?) went to Linchuan 臨川 (in modern Fuzhou City, Jiangxi Province) as defense commissioner with Li Jing 李璟 (r. 943-961) when Li was the heir apparent. See Zu Shiheng, "Song gu zeng dali pingshi Wuchang Shifujun muzhiming," in Zeng Zaozhuang and Liu Lin (eds.), *Quan Song wen*, vol. 17, p. 377. And, Shi Xubai decided to move to the Xunyang 潯陽 (in modern Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province) area after giving up his political career. It was the place where the *Bailudong shuyuan* 白鹿洞書院 (White Deer Grotto Academy), a state school, was located. This made it easy for the Shi family to get acquainted with several scholars, who in their youth studied at the academy and in their maturity became high-ranking officials. Wu Qiao 伍喬 (?-?) was one of them. He was a *jingshi* of 954. See Liu Tingluan 劉廷鑾, "Guichi xianzhi lue 貴池縣志略," in Li Yuchang 李愈昌 and Liang Guobiao 梁國標 (eds.), (Kangxi) *Guichi xianzhi* (康熙) 貴池縣志 (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1983), *juan* 5, p. 4. He wrote at least one poem to Shi Xubai and its content shows that they had gone sightseeing together and maintained a friendship even after Wu left. See Cao Xuechuang 曹學佺, *Shicang lidai shixuan* 石倉歷代詩選, *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書, vol. 1387 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), p. 594. As the *Diaoji* author had close and lasting relations with the Shi family, it is very likely that he could obtain information from various channels through the network composed of these high-ranking and local officials.

the *History of the Five Dynasties* 舊五代史, both of which were completed before the *Diaoji*. On the side of private historiography, there was Zheng Wenbao's 鄭文寶 (953-1003) *Nantang jinshi* finished before the *Diaoji* in 977. Zheng wrote another book regarding the kingdom's history, entitled the *Jiangbiao zhi* 江表志, completed in 1010. It should be noted that Zheng was Xu Xuan's disciple and that he once served at the Song court. Chen Pengnian 陳彭年 (961-1017), who was Zheng's colleague in both the Southern Tang and the Song as well as Xu's disciple, also composed a book, the *Jiangnan biele* 江南別錄, in order to supplement Xu Xuan's work. In this context, the *Diaoji* was the first work about the Southern Tang whose author had no official relations to either the Southern Tang or the Song dynasty and also no personal relations with Xu Xuan. Because Xu Xuan, his disciples, and the *Diaoji* author were all subjects of the Southern Tang, they were *ipso facto* its survivors. One of their shared concerns was to account for the rise and fall of the kingdom to which they once belonged. Nevertheless, this shared concern did not result in a shared understanding of the issue. On the contrary, these books present contending views of the kingdom's politics, contested judgments of its rulers and ministers, and conflicting analyses of its problems.

In an effort to understand the differences between these works, recent scholarship has begun to research them from a comparative perspective.⁹ Although this new direction is promising, existing scholarship still pays heavy attention to the question: Which accounts adhere closer to reality? As a result, some information is ruled out from discussion because it has no substantial relation to concrete matters. For example, most works include auspicious rumors that circulated before the first ruler of the Southern

⁹ One of the best examples is a dissertation by Chen Xiaoying 陳曉瑩. See her "Liangsong shiqi guangyu Wudai Shiguo shi de yanjiu 兩宋時期關於五代十國史的研究," Ph.D. Dissertation (Jinan: Shandong daxue, 2010). There are also studies focusing on one author and his writings. For example, Bi Linlin 畢琳琳, "Zheng Wenbao ji qi suozhu Nantang er shi yanjiu 鄭文寶及其所著南唐二史研究," Master Thesis (Shanghai: Fudan daxue, 2012). Earlier literature appreciates these works as primary sources that help scholars understand the history of the Southern Tang. See, for example, Wang De-yi 王德毅, "Songdai shijia de Wudai shixue 宋代史家的五代史學," in Beijing daxue Zhongguo gudaishi yanjiu zhongxin 北京大學中國古代史研究中心 (ed.), *Deng Guangming jiaoshou bainian danchen jinian wenji* 鄧廣銘教授百年誕辰紀念文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), pp. 22-38; also Johannes L. Kurz, "A Survey of the Historical Sources for the Five Dynasties and the Ten States in Song Times," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 33 (2003), pp. 187-224.

Tang, Li Bian 李昇 (r. 937-943), came to power. Modern researchers often treat such information as superstition and without historical significance. However, as this article will demonstrate, to include such rumors was to make a political statement, by which the authors not only apologetically cleansed the stigmas the Song dynasty imposed on the kingdom, but also interpreted the circumstances that defined its destiny. Furthermore, current scholarship has manifested another tendency – identifying issues that these authors disagreed on and then elaborating upon their differences. But what remains unclear is how to understand an author’s specific opinion in terms of his own line of thought. We may read, for example, various judgments about a specific minister, but we do not know why different authors held diverse assessments about this person. Nor do we know how an author conceptualized his judgments and integrated his ideas.

To follow this new direction of research on the historical writing of the Southern Tang, and at the same time overcome its limitations, this article focuses on the concepts the *Diaoji* author developed to understand the history of the kingdom. It will discuss his historical discourse and will show that one of its purposes was to secure a legitimate place in history for the Southern Tang. He developed a crucial concept, the “peripheral hegemonic state” 偏霸, to comprehend the history of the Southern Tang.¹⁰ This concept

¹⁰ “Peripheral hegemonic state” is not a term coined by the *Diaoji* author. Xiao Zifan 蕭子範 (?-?) of Qi 齊 (479-502) had earlier referred to Wu of the Three Kingdoms as a peripheral hegemonic state. See Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (ed.), *Yiwen lei ju* 藝文類聚 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), *juan* 16, p. 301. Sun Guangxian 孫光憲 had also used the term to refer to the Early Shu 前蜀 (907-925). See Sun Guangxian, *Beimeng suoyan* 北夢瑣言 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), p. 141. Around the time when *Diaoji* was completed, Emperor Taizong used it to vaguely categorize the states in the period of political division. See Li Tao 李燾, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), *juan* 24, p. 543, 983/5/21 太宗太平興國八年四月壬辰條. And, the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, compiled between 977 and 983, has 20 *juan* of “peripheral hegemonic states” that include most of the states in the Three Kingdoms and Southern and Northern Dynasties. See Li Fang 李昉 et al. (eds.), *Taiping yulan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960). Slightly after the completion of the *Diaoji*, Zheng Wenbao used this term in his *Jiangbiao zhi*, which was finished in 1010, to refer to Wuyue 吳越. See Zheng Wenbao, *Jiangbiao zhi*, in Fu Xuancong, Xu Hairong and Xu Jijun (eds.), *Wudai shishu huibian*, vol. 9, p. 5084. And Huang Xiufu 黃休復 used it in his *Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄, which was completed in the first decade of the eleventh century, to characterize the Early Shu. See Huang Xiufu, *Yizhou minghua lu* (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1966), *juan* 1b, p. 11. These cases show that the term was in common usage at this time to refer negatively to a peripheral hegemonic state as lacking in legitimacy. Nevertheless, the *Diaoji* author did not share this view. Rather, as will be discussed in this article, he skillfully appropriated the term to defend the legitimacy of the Southern Tang. Furthermore, it should be noted that the first recorded use of

contains an idea of a limited mandate of heaven, a geopolitical analysis of the Southern Tang situation, and a plan for the kingdom to compete with its rivals for the supreme political authority over all under heaven. With this concept, the *Diaoji* author implicitly disputes official historiography's demeaning definition of the Southern Tang, and condemns the second ruler, Li Jing as well as several ministers, for abandoning Li Bian's plan and leading the kingdom astray. The work also stresses the need to recruit authentic Confucians to administer the government. As such, this article argues that the *Diaoji* should be understood as a politico-historical book of the late tenth century.

2. The Merits and the Myth: The Establishment of the Southern Tang

The first six anecdotes, and their corresponding commentaries, in the *Diaoji* concern the founding ruler, Li Bian, and the establishment of the Southern Tang. These anecdotes emphasize Li's legitimacy from two perspectives. First, Li is portrayed as a person with unique characteristics and merits. He was a member of the ruling group of Wu of the Ten Kingdoms. Unlike his colleagues, who took pleasure in showing off their military power and who tended to solve quarrels by fighting and killing, he was fond of literature, welcomed scholars, and discussed administrative matters with them.¹¹ When he became the *de facto* ruler of Wu, he expanded his circle by welcoming able men from inside and outside Wu territory, receiving them at a pavilion, the *yanbin ting* 延賓亭 (pavilion for recruiting distinguished guests), beside his residence, and assigning them to suitable positions. He also diametrically changed his predecessor's administration, in ways that included treating scholars with good manners, cutting all unnecessary expenses, easing

this term occurs in the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, in a passage where Bo Yi 伯夷 and Shu Qi 叔齊 praised Zhou Wenwang 周文王 as a *pianba* 偏伯 and decided to travel to his land. See Lü Buwei 呂不韋, *Lüshi chunqiu xinjiaoshi* 呂氏春秋新校釋, commentated by Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), *juan* 12, p. 640. In this case, this term not only has no negative connotation, but contains a hope for a prosperous life and bright future. It is unclear whether the *Diaoji* author took the *Lüshi chunqiu* as his source of inspiration, but he obviously used the term in a positive way.

¹¹ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, p. 5003.

punishment, and immersing himself in governmental affairs.¹² The author notes that this change benefited the people so enormously that when Li overthrew the Wu ruler and founded the Southern Tang, they did not show remorse for Wu. This demonstrates, as the author empathetically maintains, that the people were deeply moved by Li's "great virtue" 盛德.¹³ The *Diaoji* author also applauds Li's achievements: during his reign, people enjoyed a peaceful and prosperous life, fathers did not suffer the loss of their sons and older brothers did not endure their younger brothers' deaths in war; and cultural activities were robust, almost reaching as high as the peak of the Tang.¹⁴ Li was thus portrayed as a ruler who lived up to his claims that he was the progeny of the Tang imperial family who could recommence the interrupted dynasty.¹⁵ This image of Li Bian also conveys a clear message: his leadership brought forth a transition of ethos – from military strength to civil management. Consequently, while other areas were still experiencing constant conflict and struggle, the Southern Tang had emerged as an area where local people were free of suffering and even "migrants could find a proper place to lead a good life" 流離僑寓之人，亦獲〔安〕堵。¹⁶ In other words, Li's kingdom was glorified as the place where hopes for the end of a long chaotic period were realized.

In addition to highlighting Li Bian's merits, the *Diaoji* author adopted a second strategy to argue for Li's legitimacy. This strategy involved a series of myths. For example, in the first anecdote, the author described how Xu Wen 徐溫 (862-927), Li's foster father and the real power holder in the Wu kingdom, transferred Li from Jinling 金陵 (modern Nanjing), where Li was popular for his excellent administration, to Jingkou 京口 (modern Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province), which was Xu's stronghold. It was an action intended to uproot Li from his area of influence and relocate him to a place where Xu's own confidants could watch him. Li was disappointed and was about to request to move to Xuancheng 宣城 (in Anhui Province), but Song Qiqiu 宋齊丘 (887-959) convinced him that he should accept the Jingkou appointment. Song pointed out that the

¹² Ibid., p. 5005.

¹³ Ibid., p. 5006.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 5007-5008.

¹⁵ Li Bian made this claim after he ascended the throne. See the detailed description in Ma Ling, *Nantang shu*, p. 5260.

¹⁶ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, p. 5008.

place name literally meant “the mouth of the capital,” implying that it was on the doorstep of the capital and that Li Bian was only one step away from possessing it. It was an auspicious sign that matched with Li Bian’s character as a person with “great ambition” 大志. Song furthermore offered another rationale. Because Xu’s own son, stationed across the river from Jingkou, was reckless and rude, turmoil was about to break out. When it did, Li could swiftly respond to suppress the disorder, thus earning military merit. Events indeed unfolded as Song predicted. The author notes that from this incident Li’s “aspiration to become hegemon was set in motion” 霸圖〔兆〕於此.¹⁷ This anecdote is full of political struggle and calculation, but its key point is Song’s explanation of the place name Jingkou, which implies the concept of auspice – the capital is meant for the real ruler. In his commentary, the *Diaoji* author interprets this story entirely from the perspective of an auspicious mandate. He lists a series of “what-if” situations to illustrate that Li was destined to be a king. If Xu had not envied Li’s administrative accomplishments at Jinling, Li would not have had the opportunity to be stationed at Jingkou. If Li’s request to move to Xuancheng had been granted, he would not have obtained the post at Jingkou. And, if Li were not at Jingkou when the chaos arose in Xu’s son’s base, he would not have been able to attain the military merit that he needed to realize his ambition. The author then concludes that the mandate of heaven determined all of these developments, which human will could not plan for or change.

The second anecdote offers a similar example. After Li Bian had fortified his power, Xu Wen started weighing the possibility of replacing him with Xu’s own son. Li was feared, and other officials were not sure with whom they should side. In this uncertain situation, Song Qiqiu consulted a diviner. While they were talking, they heard the sound of drums in the distance. The diviner stood up and told Song that he did not have to worry about Li’s future because Li’s status was as steady as Mount Tai 泰山. He continued, “The one with evil intention is doomed to suffer disaster” 懷惡志者自當受禍. Before dawn, a scout returned to report that Xu had died. The commentary uses this anecdote to reinstate the idea that everyone has his pre-assigned position which cannot be altered – just like mountains stand high and cannot be lowered into marshes. Except for diviners, no one can foretell the future. Therefore, many people wish for what they are not destined

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 5003.

to have and cause enormous troubles.¹⁸

The *Diaoji* author also recounts an unusual phenomenon. The first winter sacrifice for heaven and earth after Li changed his family name from Xu to Li, ascended to the throne and claimed his intent to restore the Tang dynasty took place in the evening. The moon did not set at the time when it was supposed to. Rather, it remained in the sky, making the night bright like daytime until the sacrificial fire had entirely died out. In the commentary, the author dismisses the claim that heaven might not show such a glorious sign to confirm the legitimacy of a relatively small kingdom like the Southern Tang. Citing a number of similarly unusual phenomena as precedents, the author argues that auspicious omens corresponded to virtuous deeds and that heaven would certainly bestow the mandate upon Li Bian, a ruler who brought peace and prosperity to his kingdom.¹⁹

The particularity of these anecdotes and commentaries does not lie in their claim that a founding ruler had the mandate of heaven, since making such claims was a common practice throughout Chinese history.²⁰ However, by the time the author completed his book, the Southern Tang had been classified in official historiography, the *History of the Five Dynasties*, as a state of *jianqie* 僭竊 (usurpation and thievery). In the narrative, the character 偽 (*wei*, pseudo) or the like is always used to denounce the name of the kingdom and the reigns of its rulers who were labeled as imposters. Everything glorious had been stripped from its history, and only its darkest matters were emphatically recorded. And, in their commentary, the compilers of the *History of the Five Dynasties* characterized Li Bian as “one who replaced pseudonym with pseudonym” 以偽易偽.²¹ This official historiographical determination, characterizing the Southern Tang as a political authority without legitimacy, corresponded to the idea of a linear transmission of the mandate of heaven from the Tang dynasty through the turbulent and short-lived Five Dynasties to the Song dynasty.²² Even though various states coexisted with one or several of these dynasties, none could claim the mandate of heaven. The Southern Tang

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5004.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 5006-5007.

²⁰ For a detailed discussion, see Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, *Zhongguo lishi shang zhi zhengtong lun* 中國歷史上之正統論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015).

²¹ Xue Juzheng 薛居正 et al. (eds.), *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), *juan* 134, pp. 2079-2085, 2090.

²² See Li Tao, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, *juan* 1, p. 10, 960/4/21 太祖建隆元年三月壬戌條.

was no exception. In other words, the exclusivity and linearity of the concept of the transmission of the mandate of heaven was inherent in official historiography because this principle was crucial to Song legitimacy.

Under these circumstances, the *Diaoji* author's argument for the Southern Tang's mandate of heaven sharply disputed the definition the *History of the Five Dynasties* had imposed. Nevertheless, he did not intend to challenge Song legitimacy. By calling the army of the Song dynasty the "sovereign's troops" 王師,²³ he unequivocally admitted that the Song had eventually received the mandate of heaven. Rather, he developed a concept, *pian ba* 偏霸, or peripheral hegemonic state, to suggest an alternative conception for the period of political division. He cited as evidence two songs by a wild Buddhist monk in a yellow cap and a rumor circulating in Wu territory. Both of them contained the character 鯉 *li* (carp) or its image. The first example reads, "The carp flies to the sky from the Eastern Sea" 東海鯉魚飛上天. No one knew what this meant until the first ruler of the kingdom changed his family name from Xu to Li and declared that he had founded a kingdom to continue the Tang dynasty. The *Diaoji* author interpreted these phenomena in his commentary as follows:

Li as carp and Li as a family name share the same sound. A fish that grows fleshy horns is a dragon. Even though its scales are embroidered with gold, it is still a fish. Southern Tang was a strong state. However, it ended up as a peripheral hegemonic state. That matches the image of the fish.

鯉之與李，聲相通也。魚而肉角則龍矣。雖以金刻麟，猶為魚也；江南雖為強國，而以偏霸終焉，魚之象也。²⁴

This commentary uses the homophone between *li* as carp and *li* as the family name of the Tang emperors as a strategy to connect the metamorphosis of a carp with the rise of Li Bian.²⁵ As a carp has barbels close to its mouth, with horns grown from its head, and

²³ This term is used several times in the twenty-second anecdote on pages 5020, 5021, and 5022.

²⁴ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, p. 5005.

²⁵ This homophone had been understood in the Tang dynasty as prohibiting people from catching, eating, or selling carp. See Duan Chengshi 段成式, *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 (Taipei: Hanjing wenhua, 1983), *juan* 17, p. 163; Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), *juan* 5, p. 135.

its scales embroidered in gold, it would appear like a dragon.²⁶ The rumor thus conveyed the following message: just as a dragon could emerge from a carp, Li Bian could rise to be a ruler. However, as the author further explains, the downside of this omen was that the carp was in essence a fish. Through this interpretation, the author insisted that the carp/Li Bian had become a dragon/ruler, but conceded that a dragon transformed from a fish was not a naturally born dragon and thus Li Bian could only hold the position of peripheral hegemon. In other words, Li Bian was like a fish-shaped dragon, which was a dragon but a dragon constrained in the shape of fish. The *Diaoji* author then proceeded to compare Li Bian's restoration of the Tang dynasty with a number of historical precedents in which an imperial descendant had built a new dynasty under the same, or different, name of a fallen dynasty. The author proclaimed that Li Bian did inherit the blood of the Tang imperial family.²⁷ He thus successfully preserved a legitimate place with a limited mandate of heaven for Li Bian and skillfully circumvented the risk of upsetting the Song emperor.

It should be noted that the *Diaoji* author's interpretation of the status of the Southern Tang actually deviated from Li Bian's expectation in a significant way. When discussing the best political and military strategies for the Southern Tang, Li Bian once described the northern states as "usurpation and thievery"²⁸ – the same term used by the compilers of the *History of the Five Dynasties* to disapprovingly refer to the Southern Tang. Li contended by this term that there was only one legitimate political authority at that time. He would have disagreed with the compilers' definition of his kingdom, but he shared with them the idea that the mandate of heaven could only be bestowed upon one state. The *Diaoji* author's attitude was more complicated. In the tenth anecdote he admits that the Later Zhou 後周 (951-960) did have the mandate of heaven.²⁹ However, after he had recounted the war between the Later Zhou and the Southern Tang, he wrote a long commentary on Emperor Shizong's 世宗 (954-959) invasion. The main point of this

²⁶ At least two incidents before the establishment of the Tang dynasty connected large carp and the Li family. The large carp was considered as a kind of dragon and its emergence was seen as a sign of the Li family's rise to the throne. See an entry from Du Bao's 杜寶 *Daye shiyi lu* 大業拾遺錄 and one from the *Guang wuxing ji* 廣五行記 included in Li Fang et al. (eds.), *Taiping yulan*, juan 936, p. 4160.

²⁷ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, p. 5005.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5011.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5012.

commentary is that the Later Zhou's army did not consist of the "sovereign's troops." The most telling evidence he marshaled in support of this position was the reaction of the people of the Southern Tang. Unlike the Song army, the real "sovereign troops," who did not need to slaughter people to take over the kingdom's entire territory, Emperor Shizong encountered severe resistance and could only obtain a part of its land. The author thus defined the Later Zhou as a political authority whose reputation and status was placed between the Warring States period states of Chu 楚 and Qi 齊.³⁰ That is, the Later Zhou was as much a hegemonic state as the Southern Tang. Both were equally legitimate and had a limited mandate from heaven.

The *Diaoji* author's sense of equality and multiplicity underpins his conception of a peripheral hegemonic state. The twenty-fourth anecdote reiterates this sense by citing Chang Mengxi 常夢錫 (?-?) to criticize those who considered the northern states superior and the Southern Tang inferior.³¹ With this idea, the author would reject the linear and exclusive view of the transmission of the mandate of heaven, which was upheld by both Li Bian and the Song emperors. With this same idea, however, he would not deny the legitimacy of the Five Dynasties, which was vital to the authority of the Song dynasty. The conception of a peripheral hegemonic state, which allowed multiple limited mandates of heaven, provided a conceptual framework for interpreting periods of political division. It was a survivor's historiographical invention, and it enabled the author to maneuver under Song dynasty pressure to give the Southern Tang a place in the political order as one of the contending states.

3. Geopolitical Analysis and the Plan for a Peripheral Hegemonic State

To the *Diaoji* author, "limited mandate of heaven" and "peripheral hegemonic state" were not only meaningful anchors to the Southern Tang's legitimacy, but also principles to judge the validity of its policies. Regarding the proper way to administer the Southern Tang, three strategies had been proposed. One was Li Bian's idea based on his own

³⁰ Ibid., p. 5009.

³¹ Ibid., p. 5023.

geopolitical analysis; the other two had been recommended by different groups of ministers. The *Diaoji* author recorded all of these strategies but stood by Li's idea, which he considered to be best suited to the circumstances of a peripheral hegemonic state.

The first strategy was brought forth by Shi Xubai. With two sage kings and two able ministers of ancient times in mind, Shi visited Song Qiqiu and answered Li Bian's inquiry about what goal the state should set for itself. Shi's advice stressed the necessity of retaking the north and moving the capital to Chang'an 長安 and Luoyang 洛陽 in order to match Li's own claim that he was restoring the Tang dynasty.³² Shi thus regarded military success in reunifying the north and the south as a necessary manifestation of an admirable leader's virtue. Han Xizai, a good friend of Shi and a high-ranking minister of the Southern Tang, held similar ideas regarding what goal the kingdom should strive to achieve. Before crossing the river to the south, he proclaimed, "As long as the ruler in the south recruits me as his prime minister, I will return with troops and bring peace to the north" 江淮用吾為相，當長驅以定中原。³³ Han's ambition was to assist southern rulers defeat northern states and put an end to the political division of the time. Nevertheless, Li Bian could not do what Shi suggested; he assigned him to the position of editor, and Shi quit soon after. The *Diaoji* author commented upon Shi's meetings with Song and Li Bian as follows:

Di (emperor) embodies the root [of governance]. *Wang* (kings) embodies its flower. *Ba* (hegemony) embodies its branch. What is minor cannot act major, just like what is located in the east cannot function in the west. Here came a man like this [i.e. Shi Xubai]. He earnestly advised Li Bian to follow the way of *wang* but did not succeed. Then he [Shi Xubai] could only depart. How could he trim [his grand plan to fit with] this minor purpose?

帝者得其根莖，王者得其英華，霸者得其附枝。小之不可以為大，猶東之不可以為西也。有如之人者，邀說烈祖以王者之事而不合，則有卷之而已矣。夫豈肯斲而小之也哉？³⁴

³² Ibid., p. 5027.

³³ Ma Ling, *Nantang shu*, p. 5351.

³⁴ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, pp. 5027-5028.

This commentary deserves further analysis. First, the author employed a set of concepts – *di* 帝 (emperor), *wang* 王 (king), and *ba* 霸 (hegemon) – to elucidate the difference between Shi and Li. He alluded to the meetings between Duke Xiao of Qin 秦孝公 (r. 361 B.C.-338 B.C.) and Shang Yang 商鞅 (390 B.C.-338 B.C.),³⁵ where Shang proposed three goals for a state to pursue – *di*, *wang*, and *ba* – and strategies related to each of the three goals. This implies that during an unsettled period there are three ways to manage a state. Second, while Shang constantly changed his position on the proper way a ruler should administer his state, Shi Xubai held fast to his idea without trying to please Li Bian. In the *Diaoji* author's eyes, it was an action of integrity, and as he put it, Shi's departure from Li's court showed Shi's unwillingness to cut a huge log (i.e. the way of *wang*) into small pieces (i.e. the way of *ba*) to fit a lesser use.³⁶ Third, using a tree as a metaphor to distinguish the superiority of the three ways of administration, the author asserted that *di* is like the root, *wang* is like the flower, and *ba* is like the branch. Needless to say, *di* should be considered that which is most essential. However, Shi Xubai only used King Tang of the Shang 商湯 (r. 1617 B.C.-1588 B.C.?) dynasty and King Wu of the Zhou 周武王 (r. 1045 B.C.-1043 B.C.) dynasty as his examples. Shi obviously did not try to persuade Li Bian to take *di* as his model. Rather, he hoped that Li would follow the course of *wang* and become a ruler as good as those two kings, who pacified rival states with military force and consequently brought peace to all under heaven. In other words, Shi maintained that in such a troubling time of political division the way of *wang*, which included the unification of the north and the south, was the best strategy for the Southern Tang to take.

Li Bian did not accept Shi Xubai's advice, because he had his own idea on how to govern. The sixth anecdote in the text describes Li as a ruler who considered the proper administration of internal affairs and the people's prosperity as his top priorities. As a result, only two years after he took the throne, the Southern Tang had risen to the point where it was the strongest among the southern states. To keep his kingdom on this track, he was convinced that peaceful relations with neighboring states were crucial. When his

³⁵ Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji huizhu kaozheng* 史記會注考證, compli. Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川龜太郎 (Taipei: Hanjing wenhua, 1983), *juan* 68, p. 892.

³⁶ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, p. 5027.

advisors and generals eagerly suggested attacking other kingdoms, Li expressed his strong disagreement. In addition to his benevolent attitude toward the people – that is, he could not bear to see them die in war – he warned his ministers that “one will never incur shame if one is satisfied with what one already has” 知足不辱, and that “leather stretched too taut will burst” 革廓則裂. He moreover forbade them from proposing similar advice again. His prime minister, Song Qiqiu, however, seeing a good opportunity to destroy the Wuyue kingdom after its court and palace had suffered a massive fire, urged him to take military action against it. Li Bian was upset and underscored that he would not take advantage of another’s suffering. Instead, he provided supplies to help Wuyue rebuild.³⁷

Li Bian’s policy was not purely benevolent or passive, but was molded by geopolitical strategic reasoning. The tenth anecdote records a meeting to which Li Bian summoned Song Qiqiu and Feng Yansi 馮延巳 (903-960). The Heir Apparent Li Jing was also present. In rejecting Feng’s advice to launch attacks against the Wuyue and Min kingdoms, the older Li presented his policy, designed to maintain the *status quo*, through an elaborate analysis of the contemporary situation. He first clarified that he did aspire to restore the full scale of the Tang dynasty. Then he cited several cases in which hasty battles had led to ruin to emphasize that the time had not yet come for him to take military action. Furthermore, he laid out three concerns: (1) Wuyue had already forged an alliance with the northern states by nominal submission. Any attack on Wuyue would almost certainly give its allies an excuse to invade the Southern Tang. (2) It was true that Min would be easy to conquer. However, its poverty and disorder would make it logistically difficult for the Southern Tang to retain. (3) An invasion would waste resources and present a potential cause of instability for the Southern Tang. In addition to these three concerns, Li stressed the benefit that the Southern Tang would enjoy from maintaining peaceful relations with both states: they could function as buffer zones against the northern states. Li Bian thus concluded that the situation might change in Southern Tang’s favor if the north should fall into chaos in the future – yet when that might happen would be for heaven to decide. For the time being, it would be wise to just

³⁷ Ibid., p. 5007.

focus on domestic matters.³⁸ He avowed, should such a chance present itself, that the Southern Tang would grasp it, defeating the “usurpers and thieves” in the north, rebuilding the capital in its original location, and then calling other southern states to submit themselves to the fully restored Tang. Right before Li Bian died, he called Li Jing to his bedside and reminded him, “Chaos will come to the north someday. Don’t forget what I have said” 他日北方當有事，勿忘吾言。³⁹

Considering Li Bian’s analysis of Shi Xubai’s advice, it is clear that Li did not reject Shi’s idea because he saw it as fundamentally wrong. As the *Diaoji* author notes, Li Bian harbored the ambition to “annex and unify” 并包席捲 other states, but the author in his commentary attributes Li’s reluctance to act to the geographical conditions of the Southern Tang. Its land was infertile, its people reckless, mischievous, and lacking in resilience. As a result, it could not compete with the northern states. In other words, Li dismissed Shi’s advice because it could not be implemented until the Southern Tang was prepared, and more importantly, until the mandate of heaven had changed. In this regard, Li was indeed a hegemon in a peripheral corner of the world, but he was a hegemon who had a keen appreciation of his kingdom’s situation. He rejected advice that involved military action – whether the targets of such action be northern or southern states. He then turned his attention to the people’s welfare and cultural activities so that the kingdom could prosper and become civilized in the fashion of the Tang dynasty.⁴⁰ In other words, the *Diaoji* author praised Li Bian as a ruler who, following the way of *ba*, led his kingdom in civil terms to reach the highest possible accomplishment given its geopolitical constraints. At the same time, Li also nurtured the kingdom’s ability to transition to the way of *wang* in the event that the mandate of heaven should change.

In giving Li Bian this positive evaluation, the *Diaoji* author felt that Shi Xubai’s and Han Xizai’s advice was unrealistic for their time. He also explicitly criticized another line of advice that later pushed the kingdom into a series of battles with its neighboring states.

³⁸ Li Bian restrained his ministers and his son from launching wars with other states. In addition to peaceful relations with neighboring states, Li also maintained collaborative diplomatic relations with the Khitans as a way to reduce the pressure from northern states. He did not emphasize this aspect of his policy, but it is a strategy he adopted to protect the Southern Tang in such a difficult geopolitical situation. See Ren Shuang 任爽, *Nantang shi* 南唐史 (Jilin: Dongbei shifan daxue chubanshe, 1995), pp. 107-109.

³⁹ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, pp. 5010-5012.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5007.

Song Qiqiu and Feng Yansi were two ministers among several others who promoted this policy. Song once characterized Shi's advice as "too grand for him to understand,"⁴¹ which shows that Song was not an adherent of the way of *wang*. An eleventh-century history of Southern Tang stated that before Song served Li Bian, he had carefully studied the persuasive skills and manipulative strategies that Shang Yang had developed to assist a hegemon.⁴² As for Feng Yansi, the *Diaoji* author compares him to Shang Yang as a man with masterful persuasive skills: his listeners enjoyed his talk so much that they would unconsciously draw their knees closer to him.⁴³ This was exactly Duke Xiao's reaction to Shang Yang in their fourth meeting.⁴⁴ Therefore, in the author's view, both Song and Feng were followers of the way of *ba*. However, their support of territorial expansion significantly diverged from Li Bian's civil and peaceful way of *ba*. When Li Bian was alive, their advice could not advance into the realm of policy. After Li Jing became ruler, however, they finally managed to convince the younger Li to put their plans into practice. The *Diaoji* author comments that this decision forced people into war, consumed the wealth accumulated during Li Bian's reign, and sent the kingdom into an irreversible downward spiral. He attributed the fall of Southern Tang to this deviation from Li Bian's original policies.⁴⁵

When judging the validity of policies for the Southern Tang, it becomes clear that the *Diaoji* author maintained that Li Bian's civil and peaceful way of *ba* corresponded best to the limited mandate of heaven. Passive in inter-kingdom relations but active in internal matters, it was the most effective way to exercise human judgment and ability within the given geopolitical conditions. The other two options, in his estimation, were either unrealistic (Shi Xubai and Han Xizai's way of *wang*) or destructive (Song Qiqiu and Feng Yansi's aggressive way of *ba*). Both should have been dismissed. Actually, Li Bian's policy could have achieved the goals towards which the way of *wang* and the aggressive way of *ba* aimed. As Li Bian explained to Song and Feng, his administration

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 5027.

⁴² Long Gun 龍袞, *Jiangnan yeshi* 江南野史, in Fu Xuancong, Xu Hairong and Xu Jijun (eds.), *Wudai shishu huibian*, vol. 9, p. 5181.

⁴³ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, p. 5013.

⁴⁴ Sima Qian, *Shiji huizhu kaozheng*, juan 68, p. 892.

⁴⁵ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, p. 5012.

should cultivate competence in order to respond in a timely way to a change in the mandate of heaven. As long as the kingdom could capitalize on such an opportunity, it could first take over the north, the goal to which Shi and Han aspired, and then the southern states would all subject themselves to the kingdom, which was Song and Feng's hope. In other words, these goals were desirable and reachable, but they had to be accomplished in the proper sequence. Any misstep would cause disaster for the kingdom – which was precisely what happened. The *Diaoji* author thus characterized Li Bian's way of *ba* as a geographically and historically sensible plan that matched the reality of the Southern Tang. It was the way suited to a peripheral hegemonic state in such a contentious period of political division.

4. Historical Critiques: The Idea of the “Authentic Confucian” and the Role of the Prime Minister

In agreeing with Li Bian's civil and peaceful way of *ba* as the best plan for the kingdom, the *Diaoji* author expressed an implicit yet important stance: being a peripheral hegemonic state was not the Southern Tang's fixed destiny, but rather only a temporary status. This status could have changed if the kingdom's administration had followed Li Bian's plan. That is, in the author's view, despite the geopolitical constraints imposed upon the Southern Tang, there was still room for human action to lift the kingdom from the status of a peripheral hegemonic state. But the deviation from Li's way of *ba* cost the kingdom its chance to put an end to political division and become the sole supreme political authority of the country. Based on this view, the author advanced a series of historical critiques concerning Southern Tang rulers and ministers, evaluating their characteristics and holding them responsible for the decline and fall of this strongest and most prosperous kingdom in the south. Some of his historical critiques are subtle, and some are straightforward. His subtle critiques are directed at the unintended consequences resulting from the civil way of *ba*. And, his straightforward critiques concern the recruitment and appointment of officials as well as the qualities and responsibilities that a prime minister should have. Through these critiques, he proposed the idea of *zhenru* 真儒 (authentic Confucian) as a crucial concept to understand the ultimate reason that the

Southern Tang, a peripheral hegemonic state with a limited mandate of heaven but great potential, failed to break through these constraints and achieve the goal it might otherwise have accomplished.

4.1 The Problem of the Scholar and the Idea of the “Authentic Confucian”

As discussed earlier, the *Diaoji* author consistently depicted Li Bian as a ruler who was eager to recruit able men to serve his kingdom and who encouraged a wide variety of cultural activities. Li’s fondness for literature, openness to scholars, and mindfulness of administrative matters were all in line with his civil way of *ba*. His successor Li Jing was thus raised in the company of officials excelling at literary performance,⁴⁶ and he became a ruler who was well versed in literature.⁴⁷ Li Jing’s successor, Li Yu, also had a great interest in scholarly discussion.⁴⁸ In the eyes of the *Diaoji* author, the tension between military and civil officials, which had been a constant and severe problem since the late Tang dynasty, was dissolved in the early history of the Southern Tang. However, the triumph of the “cultural” over the “military,” which is a testimony to the civil way of *ba*, did not result in the end of all concerns. Rather, the *Diaoji* author noted that this triumph entailed a grave, unintended consequence: as more and more scholars were recruited to become officials, distinguishing qualified from unqualified scholars became more and more difficult. He cited Chang Mengxi’s words, criticizing those who talked about “nonsensical matters and opportunist ideas” 謬悠嘗試之說 as “blinding and deafening the imperial audience” 聾瞽朝聽, to illustrate the problem: literary and rhetorical skills were so sophisticatedly deceptive that nothing could be confidently relied on to make clear judgments distinguishing honesty from dishonesty.⁴⁹

To the *Diaoji* author, this unintended consequence led to the inability to discriminate between cultural achievement and practical competence. Even worse was the failure to detect a scholar’s moral defects through the façade of embroidered words. Sun Cheng’s 孫晟 (?-956) warning to Feng Yansi exemplifies the viewpoint of the *Diaoji* author:

⁴⁶ One famous example was Han Xizai. See Wu Renchen 吳任臣, *Shiguo chunqiu* 十國春秋, in Fu Xuancong, Xu Hairong and Xu Jijun (eds.), *Wudai shishu huibian*, vol. 7, p. 3785.

⁴⁷ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, p. 5013.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5012.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5023-5024.

I know you [Feng Yansi] always look down upon me [Sun Cheng]. My literary work is not as good as yours. My talents cannot match yours. My ability to engage in humorous talk is far below yours. However, when the ruler put you under the Gate of Befriending the Worthies, his expectation was that you would assist him in following the proper path and in putting appropriate decisions into practice. You should not harm the grand plan of our kingdom.

君常輕我，我知之矣。文章不如君也，技藝不如君也，談諧不如君也。然上置君於親賢門下，期以道義相輔，不可以誤國朝大計也。⁵⁰

The arrogance that Feng held toward people like Sun was based on Feng's mastery of a diverse array of cultural expressions. Even though Sun conceded Feng's excellence in these areas, he opined that Feng's cultural accomplishments could not be automatically taken as proof of his moral and practical ability. In the ensuing commentary, the author stated that Feng was erudite, skillful in literature, and eloquent. At the same time, the author described him as a person good at guessing rulers' thoughts and craftily enticing rulers to do what he wanted.⁵¹ Both Sun's warning and the author's observation portrayed a man who seized political power by means of his superb cultural achievements, which the rulers of Southern Tang cherished and which Feng used to conceal his nefarious intentions.

The author observed similar problems with the second ruler Li Jing. Li's literary style was "pure and smooth," his appearance was "scholar-like" 宛同儒者, and his literary works were highly and widely praised. However, the author disapprovingly portrayed him as a ruler who lacked the ability to make accurate judgments. He compared Li Jing with Emperor Yuan of the Han dynasty 漢元帝 (r. 49 B.C.-33 B.C.), observing that they had the same posthumous title *yuan* 元. Citing Ban Gu's 班固 (32-92) *The History of Han Dynasty* 漢書, he explained that Emperor Yuan and Li Jing shared the same weakness – they were too tender to possess sufficient powers of discernment. Then the author elaborated on this comparison in a special way. First, he invoked the term *zhenru* (authentic Confucian), which Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.-A.D. 18) coined to

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 5012.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 5013.

explain the political failure of the Kingdom of Lu 魯國 during the Spring and Autumn period. Yang maintained that when Confucius served Lu, the Kingdom of Qi 齊國 was so afraid that it returned the lands it had previously acquired from Lu. Yang's argument was that if Lu had put "authentic Confucians" in proper positions, it would have had no rival in the world, and its territory would not have been invaded or annexed.⁵² Second, the author cited a phrase from the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, "it was [superficial] ritual, not the rites [reflective of high moral principle]" 是儀也，非禮也⁵³ to make a clear distinction between performance devoid of substance and moral deeds. He went on to use the subsequent *Zuozhuan* passage, to explain that only rites, practiced with sincerity, could safeguard the country. Third, he combined the phrases from Yang Xiong and the *Zuozhuan* to state: "without authentic Confucians, there is no way to rescue a country from danger and decline; without the true understanding of the rites, there is no way to ensure a country's safety and prosperity" 非真儒不足以救國之危削，非明禮不足以權國之安榮. And, finally, he concluded that Li Jing and his ministers should all be held responsible for the fall of Southern Tang, because they all took delight in superficial literary performance, but failed to cultivate the crucial ability to make and implement correct policies.⁵⁴

This is a harsh criticism of a ruler of the kingdom with which the *Diaoji* author identified himself. His strong resentment toward Li Jing was based on his conviction that the reign of Li Jing was the beginning of the kingdom's decline. He implicitly quoted another Yang Xiong passage to reiterate his judgment.⁵⁵ Just as Yang criticized those who plucked the feathers from a phoenix and attached them to a cuckoo as a metaphor for wasting precious resources for trivial purpose, so the author blamed Li Jing for letting the wealth accumulated in Li Bian's reign dissipate. Furthermore, there is a Jin dynasty 晉朝 (266-420) commentary to Yang's passage by Li Gui 李軌 (?-?), which reads:

This is to say that to appoint inferior men to high positions will not bring about

⁵² Yang Xiong, *Fayan* 法言 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1929), *juan* 7, p. 2.

⁵³ Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, *Zuozhuan huijian* 左傳會箋, commentated by Du Yu 杜預 and compiled by Takezoe Koko 竹添光鴻 (Taipei: Hanjing wenhua, 1984), *juan* 25, p. 22, Duke Zhao 25/12 昭公二十五年十二月條.

⁵⁴ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, pp. 5013-5014.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5008.

success. It also means that those who study trivial discourse cannot become great Confucians.

諭授小人以大位而不能成大功也。又言學小說不能成大儒。⁵⁶

This commentary contains a clear contrast between inferior men and great Confucians. It also affirms that to let inferior men, who only study trivial discourse, occupy high positions is definitely not the way to success. By inserting Yang Xiong's passage, and by extension Li Gui's assessment of its meaning, in the anecdote that records the change of policy during Li Jing's reign, the author intended to depict Li Jing as surrounded by incapable and pretentious officials. At the core of the author's comments lies a three-fold critique. First, he characterized those who enjoyed power at court as morally debased. Second, he held a reserved, if not negative, view that the skills these officials mastered to secure their high positions, in particular literary performance, were trivial. And, third, he was convinced that the recruitment and appointment system of the Southern Tang had such serious problems that incompetent people regularly had the opportunity to become entrusted with important state affairs. Similar descriptions appear several times in other anecdotes and commentaries. For example, following the tenth anecdote, which records how Zha Wenhui 查文徽 (885-954), Feng Yanlu 馮延魯 (?-?), and Chen Jue 陳覺 (?-?) wasted resources in wars with neighboring states, the author's commentary adopts the same contrast of concepts to lament that "nefarious and inferior men are not the persons to make plans for the state" 儉人小夫不足以共謀國.⁵⁷

Following this line of historical critique, the *Diaoji* author found that Li Yu's reign suffered even worse consequences from superficial scholars and inappropriate appointments. A detailed story in the twenty-second anecdote, which records a conversation between Li Yu and his ministers regarding the actions several officials and generals took to defend the kingdom, drives the point home. This anecdote depicts the final days of Southern Tang after the Song dynasty had launched a decisive attack. In the initial stage of this Song aggression, Li's advisors could not make up their minds about what to do even after numerous discussions. Some thought they could take advantage of

⁵⁶ Yang Xiong, *Fayan*, *juan* 7, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, p. 5012.

the crisis to establish their own names by advocating an aggressive military approach, but eventually they led the kingdom to a nadir at which surrender emerged as the only option. Li Yu consulted with his top advisors, including Prime Minister Xu Xuan, but they simply muttered and could not find a way to respond.⁵⁸ Xu Xuan, as the author pointed out, was famous for his “Confucian administrative skills” based on his diligent study and rich collection of books.⁵⁹ Xu’s inability to work out a plan to guard the kingdom, in the author’s view, clearly demonstrated that he was not an “authentic Confucian” and thus did not deserve to be placed in a position of authority.

The author continued by recounting an intense exchange between Li Yu, Chen Qiao 陳喬 (?-975), Chen Daya 陳大雅 (?-976?), and Zhu Lingyun 朱令贇 (?-975). The most significant part of this exchange was the conversation between Li Yu and Chen Daya. After Xu Xuan failed to offer advice, Chen Qiao suggested that Li Yu send some troops upstream to fight the Song army. However, no official dared to break through the heavy siege to deliver the order. Li Yu then turned to Chen Daya, calling Chen’s style name 字 to express respect and friendliness, and said:

Even in ordinary times Confucian scholars would earnestly assist others in need. [In this urgent time,] if you can bring yourself to go for me, that would be what is called “Strong winds make known staunch grass; times of crisis make visible loyal ministers.”

儒者也，平時尚欲急人之急，能強為孤一行，所謂「疾風知勁草，板蕩識誠臣」也。⁶⁰

Chen replied,

Your Majesty has attentively nurtured scholars for more than ten years. None of them can return a ten-thousandth of your favor. In such difficult times as these, you even have to repetitively urge them [to take action] like this!

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 5020.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 5019.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 5020.

陛下十許年來，焦心養士，群臣不能報稱萬分之一。今倉促之際，至煩玉音反覆如此。⁶¹

Chen then expressed his willingness to undertake the task of rescuing the kingdom, but argued with Li Yu over the selection of a general with whom to work to achieve that goal. They could not reach agreement even after a long discussion. Finally, Li Yu stood up and made his final remark:

All my officials always talk lofty nonsense about [sage-king] Yu and [his capable minister] Ji. But now what they want to do is to follow Ren Mannu's (fl. Mid-sixth century) steps, [surrendering to enemies and leading them to defeat us]. Upon whom should I entrust my life?

諸人平時高談禹稷，眼前但欲為任蠻奴計，孤亦何所託命也。⁶²

Li Yu's ministers' frequent reference to a sage-king and his minister from antiquity clearly shows that they could eloquently use Confucian language in general and the terms informing the way of *wang* in particular. However, their inability to respond to this urgent situation made Li Yu doubt their loyalty. Furthermore, Li Yu's disappointment with his scholar-officials, which permeated his conversation with Chen Daya, echoes the point made by the *Diaoji* author about the serious problems in Southern Tang politics. These officials were useless, as the author contended in the thirteenth commentary, not because Confucians were of no use, but because they employed Confucian terms only to boost their intellectual standing and to enhance their cultural cachet. That is, they were useless because they were not authentic Confucians.⁶³ The twenty-second commentary goes on to note that Chen Daya did not have good connections with those in power, because he could not talk about interesting things, an ability appreciated by the court's high-ranking officials. Therefore, he remained stuck in a low position. Ironically, it was Chen who stood up and tried to save the kingdom when it was in acute crisis.⁶⁴ In the author's

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 5021.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 5014.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 5022.

opinion, the failure to recognize authentic Confucians and appoint moral and qualified officials, led to the kingdom's demise.

4.2 The Problem of Recruitment and the Role of the Prime Minister

As the preceding section has shown, the *Diaoji* author identified the problem of recruitment and appointment as one of the most serious issues in the Southern Tang government, and he asserted that it was an unintended consequence of Li Bian's turn away from military and towards civil administration. Although the author provided concrete anecdotal instances, which he analyzed in his commentary, he did not make any suggestions about how to solve the problem institutionally. Given that the Southern Tang held the civil service examination almost every year after 952, the absence of this institution in his analysis suggests that he saw the solution reposing elsewhere.⁶⁵ In his view, since recommendation remained the primary channel for scholars to enter the government, it was the prime minister's responsibility to make sure that recruitment, which relied heavily on recommendation, functioned properly and worked for the kingdom. From this perspective, he distinguished in the history of the Southern Tang three types of prime ministers and proposed his concept of the ideal prime minister.

Sun Cheng represented the first type of prime minister. The *Diaoji* author portrayed him as a man of integrity, never bending his principles to please others and never meeting guests outside his office to discuss official matters. Anyone with whom he found fault would without fail be placed on his list of the disliked. And, he was truly loyal to the

⁶⁵ For the establishment of the civil service examination in the Southern Tang and its political impact, see Wu Bochang 伍伯常, "Nantang jinshike kaoshu 南唐進士科考述," *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究, 15.1 (1997), pp. 133-149; Zhou Lasheng 周臘生, "Nantang gongju kaolue 南唐貢舉考略," *Wenxian* 文獻, 2 (2001), pp. 15-24; Chen Xiuhong 陳秀宏, "Shiguo keju zhidu kao 十國科舉制度考," in Ren Shuang (ed.), *Shiguo dianzhi kao* 十國典制考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), pp. 177-207; Huang Ting-shuo 黃庭碩, "Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi: yi Yangwu, Nantang wei zhongxin 唐宋之際的東南士人與政治——以楊吳、南唐為中心," Master Thesis (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue, 2013). Scholars disagree over exactly when the civil service examination was established. In general, however, they accept that from 952 onwards the examination was held regularly, interrupted only a few times by war. Scholars agree that the number of students who passed the examination – 93 *jinshi* over the 24 years after 952 – was not significant enough to have a major impact on the politics of the Southern Tang. The political insignificance of the *jinshi* is perhaps one reason that the *Diaoji* author does not focus on the civil service examination.

kingdom – on his diplomatic mission to the Later Zhou he was executed for not revealing secret information about the Southern Tang. By all counts, he was an excellent prime minister; however, in the commentary, the author expressed doubt about his suitability for the office. Quoting Guan Zhong's 管仲 (725 B.C.-645 B.C.) reserved appraisal of his good friend Bao Shuya 鮑叔牙 (?-644 B.C.) when he was ill and asked by Duke Huan of the Qi kingdom 齊桓公 (r. ?-643 B.C.) to recommend a candidate to succeed him as prime minister, the author argued that paying too close attention to detail or remembering men's minor faults was actually not a strength but a shortcoming for a prime minister. The author furthered his argument by combining Guan Zhong's point with one made by Dugu Yu 獨孤郁 (776-815) of the Tang dynasty. He maintained that a prime minister should keep strict principles for himself, but treat others with generosity and tolerance. Equally important, to be an impartial prime minister, one had to recognize others' achievements and give them due credit. He concluded that since Sun Cheng lacked magnanimity and generosity, he should not have been appointed as prime minister.⁶⁶

Song Qiqiu was the most telling example of the second type of prime minister. He assisted Li Bian in welcoming scholars from within and without the Southern Tang. The *Diaoji* author admired him for doing a good job in Li Bian's reign, especially for his recommendation of Sun Cheng, who later could not get along with Song and Han Xizai. In the author's view, however, the problem with Song was that he cared more about his own power than about the fate of the kingdom. As a result, after a brief exile, he became alienated from Sun Cheng and Han Xizai, and chose to collaborate with junior officials, who were skilled in cultural activities and in power at that time, to alter the policy of inter-kingdom relations that was established by Li Bian as a pivotal component of the civil way of *ba*.⁶⁷ By attributing Song's change of attitude to his selfish concerns, the *Diaoji* author contended that Song was unqualified for the position of prime minister. As for Song's method of recommendation following the inception of Li Jing's reign, the author found two flaws. First, he was intolerant of those who had different opinions,⁶⁸ and only "nefarious" men who knew how to please him were promoted. Gradually, a

⁶⁶ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, pp. 5022-5023.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 5009, 5025.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5029.

group of “five demons” 五鬼, including the Feng brothers, Zha Wenhui, Chen Jue, and Wei Cen 魏岑 (?-?), formed, with more similarly debauched scholars gathering around them. Consequently, the paths for upright scholars to advance were blocked.⁶⁹

Song’s second flaw was subtler. The author presented it in the twenty-seventh anecdote which concerned Song’s debates with Sun Cheng and Han Xizai. Sun once warned Song against the latter’s selection of officials, as he worried about the moral quality of the young officials who had recently been promoted to positions that allowed them to frequently meet the ruler and the heir apparent. Song disagreed with Sun and pointedly defended his decision. He maintained that the kingdom needed a great number of scholars to facilitate its rise and that he could not wait until practically versatile and morally perfect persons appeared to fill the vacant positions. Sun challenged Song’s defense by first clarifying that his point was not that Song had to seek impeccable scholars. He reminded Song of the negative impact those problematic officials could make on the ruler and the heir apparent. Finally, he emphatically warned Song again that he should not be too confident in his ability to influence those junior officials. Once the ruler and the heir apparent became accustomed to their thought through constant interaction, it would become very difficult for Song to correct them even if he noticed the situation had taken a wrong turn.

Han Xizai provided similar advice to Song Qiqiu in more playful but no less serious language. He told Song that he saw children flying kites in the morning before their meeting. When the kites just launched, they were fully controlled by the children. Then, the children loosened their grip on the strings to see how high the kites could fly. However, the higher the kites flew, the stronger the winds blew upon them, and the more difficult it was for the children to control them. Finally, the strings broke, the kites were gone with the wind, and they were nowhere to be found. Song immediately realized that the message Han tried to convey through this story was similar to Sun’s warning. He did not argue with Han, but said he would consider their advice. Nevertheless, in the end, he held fast to his own decision.

By recording Sun’s and Han’s warnings to Song, the *Diaoji* author indicated that in the Southern Tang the prime minister had considerable power over recommendations.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 5016.

The author also emphasized that the second type of prime minister, of which Song Qiqiu was the primary example, tended to ignore the possibility that recommended scholars would develop their own relations with the ruler or the heir apparent through their governmental functions. Prime ministers should not rely on their own authority to put those they recommended on a leash. Rather, in the author's view, the best way to prevent the situation from derailing was to make sure that only morally sound scholars were recommended. Such men would neither abuse their power nor block other scholars' path into government. Song failed to follow this way, and his over-confidence not only gave the "nefarious men" the opportunity to hold power, but also sent the kingdom on the road to ruin.

Even though Song Qiqiu and Sun Cheng strongly disagreed with each other, in the *Diaoji* author's eyes, both men shared an intolerance of those who differed from them. While Sun chose to shut his door to other scholars, Song decided to take in only loyal adherents in order to strengthen his own power. The *Diaoji* author considered neither as an ideal candidate. He thus brought forth a third type of prime minister, Han Xizai, who despite never serving in that position, was esteemed as an ideal model. In the twenty-ninth anecdote, the author noted that Han was willing to make contributions to the kingdom that sheltered him, and that Han knew that the best way to do so was to recommend talented scholars. His approach was to widely open his door and warmly receive any scholar who possessed even just "one skill or one aptitude." His open-door policy was diametrically opposed to Sun Cheng's stance. The way he treated these scholars also showed that he had a different idea about junior scholars than Song. After welcoming them into his place, he would "constantly have discussions with them," and their debates about "contemporary issues would be profound and always to the point" 與相反覆論難，多深切當世之務。⁷⁰ In other words, even though he attained notoriety for providing extravagant entertainment to scholars, which was controversial to many of his contemporaries, he did not regard junior scholars as his henchmen, but rather as his protégés. He sought to nurture their knowledge and ability in order to prepare them to serve the kingdom.

The twenty-ninth anecdote continues by recording how Li Yu felt lost when Han

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 5028.

died and that he decided to confer upon him a posthumous position equal to that of prime minister. The author ended this anecdote with Li Yu's recognition of Han to make clear that Han was a true prime minister. In fact, Han's attention to the cultivation of junior scholars corresponds to the author's definition of prime ministerial responsibility:

It is truly difficult for heaven and earth to produce men of talent. The prime minister should act on heaven's behalf to nurture and facilitate all kinds of talented individuals to develop their full potential.

天地之生材也實難。宰相者，當代天工以匠成庶類者也。⁷¹

The idea of “acting on heaven's behalf” originates in the “Counsel of Gaoyao” 皋陶謨 from the *Book of Documents* 尚書. But in its original context, the point of the statement is to make sure all officials fully play their roles such that they finish what heaven has left incomplete. It was not until the Tang dynasty that the focus of the passage was placed exclusively on the prime minister. For example, the edict of 810 that appointed Quan Deyu 權德輿 (759-818) as Manager of Affairs 平章事 opened with the sentence: “The duty of the prime minister is first to act on heaven's behalf to craft the best to assist his ruler, and then to guide the people by maximizing the principles of proper management” 宰相之任，上以代天工輔佐之宜，下以立人極變調之理。⁷² It placed the prime minister in an intermediate position connecting the ruler with all the officials and the people. It might not be accidental that the *Diaoji* author made an implicit reference to this edict of 810. Li Bian proclaimed that the Southern Tang was a continuation of the Tang dynasty; it thus made sense for the author to find his inspiration in the reign of Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 805-820), who initiated a period of restoration during the mid-Tang. He actually praised Han Xizai's writing for its Yuanhe 元和 style – Yuanhe being one of the reign names of Emperor Xianzong. In other words, his purpose was to justify his own

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 5023.

⁷² Anonymous author, “Quan Deyu baixiang zhi 權德輿拜相制,” in Li Fang et al. (eds.), *Wenyuan yinghua 文苑英華* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1966), *juan* 449, p. 2271. There is another text, around the time of Quan Deyu's appointment, in which “acting on heaven's behalf” and “guiding people” are used as a pair of concepts to define the function of the prime minister. See Du Huangshang 杜黃裳, “Dongdu liushou Gugong shendaobei 東都留守顧公神道碑,” in Dong Gao 董誥 et al. (eds.), *Quan Tang wen 全唐文* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), *juan* 478, p. 4883.

definition of the prime minister's function by referencing a statement made by an admired emperor of the Tang. Furthermore, the author's argument placed particular emphasis on the prime minister's responsibility of nurturing scholars and recommending those who were qualified to serve in the government. Since the Tang, the idea of "nurturing and facilitating all kinds of talented individuals to develop to their full potential" had strong Daoist connotations. The commentaries to the *Daode jing* 道德經 by Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 685-762) described the *Dao* as impartial and thus able to endlessly nurture and facilitate all things.⁷³ From this point of view, it is obvious that Sun Cheng and Zhong Mo 鍾謨 (?-?), whom the *Diaoji* author criticized as being opposed to Han Xizai, could not fulfill their responsibilities as prime ministers because they were partisan and narrow-minded. Therefore, the *Diaoji* author made a point laden with political implications inherent in the Tang-dynasty reference, and which also reflected on the prime minister's role in the history of the Southern Tang.

Finally, in the twenty-third and the twenty-ninth commentaries, the author made a peculiar comparison between Song Qiqiu, Sun Cheng, and Han Xizai. He directed the readers' attention to their deaths and highlighted the fact that only Han was able to live out his natural lifespan. In contrast, Song starved to death after being purged from court, and Sun died on a diplomatic mission. The author also noted that only Han's offspring prospered, whereas Sun's and Song's had perished by the time his book was finished. He attributed their different fates to their different treatment of scholars. Sun's and Song's intolerance resulted in their failure to recommend appropriate scholars to the government, and this failure in turn brought catastrophic consequences for them and their families. It was punishment from heaven for not fulfilling their responsibilities as prime ministers.⁷⁴

The author's decision to introduce the idea of heaven's punishment into the narrative is significant. In his view, the fact that the mandate of heaven could not be changed by human effort did not mean that humans could act irresponsibly. As a ruler, Li Bian was his model, since he clearly understood the limited mandate of heaven his kingdom enjoyed and outlined a feasible plan for his descendants according to its status as a

⁷³ See Du Guangting 杜光庭 (ed.), *Daode zhenjing guang shengyi* 道德真經廣聖義, *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vols.1290-1291 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), *juan* 6, p. 622; *juan* 21, p. 727; *juan* 27, p. 24.

⁷⁴ Anonymous author, *Diaoji litan*, pp. 5023, 5029.

peripheral hegemonic state. As a prime ministerial candidate, Han Xizai was his model as he held an accurate view of the prime minister's role in government, which stressed the importance of nurturing scholars and recommending qualified officials. Neither good policy nor right deeds could guarantee that heaven would change the mandate in the kingdom's favor; however, implementing good policy and right decisions were the responsibilities of the men serving at court. According to the author, those who could not live up to what they were supposed to do would definitely incur unbearable punishment from heaven. He thus suggested that all who would serve in government should keep this warning in mind.⁷⁵

5. Conclusion

The period of division after the fall of the Tang dynasty challenges historians to place the political ups and downs into a historical narrative. One of the strategies chosen by the compilers of the *History of the Five Dynasties*, as official historiography backed by the Song dynasty, was to present historical process as linear and as involving a singular transmission of the mandate of heaven. In this view, a dynasty defeating an immediately preceding one obtained the mandate from its predecessor. There was no room for any other political authority to cut in line or to form a parallel line. However, the *Diaoji* author, a survivor of a state that did not have a place in this official conception of the linear and singular mandate's transmission, put forth a contending view that asserted the possibility of an interrupted transmission and the existence of multiple limited mandates of heaven during periods of division. Corresponding to the idea of multiple limited mandates of heaven, he proposed the concept of the peripheral hegemonic state to define the situation of the Southern Tang. He furthermore applauded Li Bian's civil way of *ba*, which focused on intra-state issues rather than inter-state affairs, as the most sensible plan, geopolitically speaking, for the Southern Tang. It was, the author stressed, the abandonment of Li's plan that led to the kingdom's decline and fall. With all these concepts – multiple limited mandates of heaven, peripheral hegemonic states, and the

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 5029.

civil way of *ba*, he developed a discourse that carved out a legitimate place for the kingdom in the political and historical process. This discourse also formed a foundation on which he could pass judgment on policies, rulers, and ministers. His historical critiques focused on problems with recruitment and appointment, and the unintended consequences of Li Bian's civil way of *ba*. He moreover offered the ideas of the "authentic Confucian" and the good prime minister as politico-historical reflections on the failure of the Southern Tang.

In comparison to the *Diaoji* author's conviction that the change of heaven's mandate could not be brought about by man, his attribution of the eventual fall of the Southern Tang to Li Jing and his ministers' abandonment of Li Bian's plan seems to present a contradictory view that emphasizes the significance of human effort. In the seventeenth anecdote and commentary, he expressed a similarly ambivalent attitude as to whether the destiny of the Southern Tang had been predetermined. He lamented that there were very few practically competent and morally decent ministers in the Southern Tang even though Li Bian had made enormous efforts to attract able men and cultivate scholars to serve the kingdom. As a result, he cried out with perplexing frustration: "Was this really [the effect of] heaven's will? Or was this not really [the effect of] heaven's will?" 是果天意歟？是果非天意歟？⁷⁶ The author offered no clear solution to the ambivalence inherent in this question. However, his insistence that rulers and ministers be held responsible for the inappropriate policies that led to the Southern Tang's failure shows his conviction that the kingdom's destiny was not entirely predetermined. Or, more precisely, before the decisive moment arrived there was room for human effort, which although not able to induce the change of the mandate, could prepare the state for that critical moment. In the author's view, the mid-tenth-century chaos in the north was exactly the moment for the Southern Tang to act: the mandate was at that time open for all the main political actors, each of which had a limited mandate of heaven, to grasp, but none of them had accumulated the power to claim it. Only the kingdom that had prepared extensively for this change could successfully take advantage of this moment – the Southern Tang, having strayed from the right path, thus missed their chance. Through this view, the author offered a unique understanding of the historical process of political division. This

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 5016-5017.

understanding, on the one hand, runs counter to the debased definition of the Southern Tang proposed in the *History of the Five Dynasties*, and on the other hand, enables him to assess the merits and faults of those who participated in guiding the historical course of the kingdom.

Finally, the idea of the “authentic Confucian,” which the *Diaoji* author proposed to address issues of recruitment and appointment, later became a term scholars used to praise their colleagues as model officials. A thorough treatment of how this idea was employed in connection with each scholar’s political and intellectual position within the broader Song context would require an article-length discussion. In the eleventh century, along with their respect for Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824), a number of scholars promoted Yang Xiong, whom the *Diaoji* author quoted to make his point, as a Confucian sage. These scholars were familiar with Yang’s works, especially the *Fayan*, where the idea appeared.⁷⁷ For example, in a 1033 letter, Shi Jie 石介 (1005-1045) referred to Sun Fu 孫復 (992-1057) as an “authentic Confucian,” because Sun, Shi asserted, was a scholar who studied the Confucian way and understood the meaning of heaven, earth, and man.⁷⁸ Shi also used the same term in a 1029 poem to express his respect for Liu Kai 柳開 (948-1001), particularly praising Liu’s practical ability to serve the country.⁷⁹ Later in the century, one of Huang Tingjian’s 黃庭堅 (1145-1105) poems admired Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086) as an “authentic Confucian” when Wang was reappointed chief councilor in 1075.⁸⁰ In 1087, Huang wrote yet another poem for his friend Gu Lin 顧臨

⁷⁷ For related studies, see Liu Chengguo 劉成國, “Lun Tang Song jian zun Yang sichao yu guwen yundong 論唐宋間尊揚思潮與古文運動,” *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產, 5 (2011), pp. 68-81.

⁷⁸ Shi Jie, “Shang Sun Shaofu shu 上孫少傅書,” in *Culai ji* 徂徠集, *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu*, vol. 1090, *juan* 15, p. 287. For the date of this letter, see Chen Zhie 陳植鏗, *Shi Jie shiji zhuzhuo bianian* 石介事跡著作編年 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), p. 38.

⁷⁹ Shi Jie, “Guo Wei dongjiao 過魏東郊,” in *Culai ji*, *juan* 2, p. 195. For the date of this poem, see Chen Zhie, *Shi Jie shiji zhuzhuo bianian*, p. 22.

⁸⁰ Huang Tingjian has a poem titled “Feng he Wang Shibi jishang qixiong xiansheng yong qi yun” 奉和王世弼寄上七兄先生用其韻, and he wrote a line in this poem which reads “聖緒今皇纘, 真儒運斗樞” (Today’s emperor continues the thread of the sages/ The authentic Confucian holds the handle of the Northern Dipper). See Huang Tingjian, *Shangu waiji shizhu* 山谷外集詩注, commented by Shi Rong 史容, *Sibu congkan xubian* 四部叢刊續編, vol. 55 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1919), *juan* 2, p. 22. According to Shi Rong’s commentary, the “authentic Confucian” refers to Wang Anshi. Furthermore, Huang Xun 黃勗 (1150-1212), Huang Tingjian’s cousin’s grandson, notes that this poem was written in 1075 when Wang Anshi was reappointed as chief councilor. See Huang Xun, *Shangu nianpu* 山谷年譜,

(?/?), which encouraged Gu to be an authentic Confucian by managing bandit and water control issues.⁸¹ Around the same time, Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) adopted the term in the epitaph he penned for his elder brother Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085). He maintained that the transmission of the teaching of the sages had ceased after Mencius until his brother, like authentic Confucians in antiquity, assumed the responsibility for continuing true learning.⁸²

These texts show that the idea of the authentic Confucian gradually gained currency in the mid and late eleventh century as scholars developed the concept to emphasize an individual's intellectual achievements, political abilities, or both. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the 1075 edict that reappointed Wang Anshi as chief councilor also used this term to affirm Wang's moral, scholarly, and political qualifications for this position.⁸³ This was about one and a half years after Wang had resigned from the same position over criticism directed against his New Policies. By characterizing Wang as an authentic Confucian, the edict demonstrated the emperor's support for Wang and politically charged this term. From this perspective, Huang Tingjian's 1075 poem was an unequivocal defense of Wang. However, the *Diaoji* author's warning of the consequences of not recognizing authentic Confucians and thus recruiting feeble scholars to serve in the government perhaps found its way into the discourse of Wang's opponents. For example, Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086), who was also familiar with the *Fayan*, recorded in his *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 that Emperor Xuan of the Han 漢宣帝 (r. 74 B.C.-49 B.C.), had criticized the heir apparent, who later assumed the throne as Emperor Yuan, for his appreciation of Confucian scholars. Emperor Xuan maintained that the Han dynasty had been established according to the way of *ba* and that Confucians had nothing to do with the way of *ba* and were thus useless to the dynasty. Immediately after recording Emperor Xuan's criticism, Sima offered his own commentary, contending that Confucians are of great use to the government. The fault of Emperor Xuan was that he was unable to

Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu, vol. 1113, *juan* 6, p. 841.

⁸¹ Huang Tingjian, *Shangu ji* 山谷集, *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu*, vol. 1113, *juan* 3, p. 28.

⁸² Cheng Yi, "Mingdao xiansheng mubiao 明道先生墓表," in Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao, *Er Cheng ji* 二程集 (Taipei: Hanjing wenhua, 1983), *juan* 11, pp. 639-640.

⁸³ Anonymous author, "Wang Anshi bai zhaowenxiang zhi 王安石拜昭文相制," in Anonymous author, *Songchao da zhaoling ji* 宋朝大詔令集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), *juan* 56, p. 284.

distinguish between authentic Confucians and inferior scholars. Sima asserted that if the emperor had recruited authentic Confucians, the government would have been well administered.⁸⁴ Sima's point and style of argumentation were almost identical to those of the *Diaoji* author.⁸⁵ Several years after the completion of *Zizhi tongjian*, Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049-1100) used the term twice in his poetry. One of these uses relates the term to Emperor Yuan and makes a clear distinction between authentic Confucians and “rotten” scholars 腐儒. This usage was perhaps inspired by Sima's commentary and also

⁸⁴ Sima Guan, *Xinjiao zizhi tongjian zhu* 新校資治通鑑注, commented by Hu Sanxing 胡三省 and Zhang Yu 章鈺 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 2009), *juan* 27, p. 881, Ganlu of Emperor Xuan 1/1 漢宣帝甘露元年正月條.

⁸⁵ Apparently, there are no references in Sima Guang's writings that reveal his knowledge of the *Diaoji*. And, it is true that the *Diaoji* does not appear in any bibliography until You Mao's 尤袤 (1127-1194) *Suishu tang shumu* 遂書堂書目 (*Bibliography of the Suishu Hall*). So it is fair to ask whether Sima Guang did get from the *Diaoji* the idea to combine the term “authentic Confucian” with Emperor Xuan's comment on Emperor Yuan. However, there is perhaps a subtle but crucial way that Sima could have become aware of the book. Liu Huan 劉渙 (1000-1080) has a surviving colophon to a *Qiniu ge* 騎牛歌 (the song of riding oxen). In this colophon, he specifically recalled the legend of Shi Xubai, in which Shi rode on the back of an ox, strolling among mountains and streams, and stated that “there is still now a painting of Mr. Shi riding on the back of oxen” 民間尚存史先生騎牛圖. To imitate Shi's legend, Liu described his life of retirement after Chen Shunyu 陳舜俞 (?-1072) came to Liu's hometown in exile as one in which he enjoyed the beauty of springs and rocks. He used a distinctive term “two oxen” 雙犢 that had been a constituent part of the Shi legend. What is significant is that Liu bought fields and a residence in the Luoxing wan 落星灣 (cove of fallen stars) where the Shi family also lived. See Liu Yuangao 劉元高, *San Liu jiaji* 三劉家集, *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu*, vol. 1345, p. 545. More information can be found in Chen Shunyu, *Duguan ji* 都官集, *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu*, vol. 1096, pp. 533-535. In other words, Liu Huan, who was 60 years younger than Shi Kun and perhaps 30 years younger than Shi Wen, had connections with Shi Xubai not only through spiritual admiration, but also through local affinity. Furthermore, one of Liu Huan's sons was Liu Shu 劉恕 (1032-1078), who was Sima Guang's major assistant when writing his *Zizhi tongjian*. Since the Liu family lived in a place where the Shi family was likely still active in terms of social networks and material presence, it seems possible that through casual conversation with Liu Shu in 1076, when Liu was also in Luoyang, Sima became aware of the *Diaoji* author's link between the term “authentic Confucian” and Emperor Xuan's comment on Emperor Yuan even though the book was not openly published in Sima's time. As for the reason why Sima did not even include this book in his *Zizhi tongjian kaoyi* 資治通鑑考異 (*Critical Comments on Textual Variants of Zizhi Tongjian*), one of the reasons perhaps lies in the official ban on portents in the Northern Song. Regarding the Song's policy on the circulation of portents, see Chang Wei-ling 張維玲, “Jingdian quanshi yu quanli jingzhu: Beisong qianqi ‘Taiping’ de xingsu yu jiegou (960-1063) 經典詮釋與權力競逐：北宋前期「太平」的形塑與解構 (960-1063),” Ph.D. Dissertation (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue, 2015), pp. 96-100.

conveyed his implicit critique of Wang Anshi.⁸⁶ There were various ways in which the idea of the authentic Confucian continued to be elaborated and redefined throughout the Southern Song.⁸⁷ It would be wrong to maintain that there was a linear transmission of the idea from the *Diaoji* author to scholars of later generations through Sima Guang, because there was a diversity of ways in which the term was employed after the *Diaoji* author. However, it seems fair to say that by reflecting on the history of the Southern Tang the *Diaoji* author worked out a way to substantiate the distinction between authentic Confucians and other kinds of scholars in terms of their scholarship and practical ability. This can perhaps be considered a Southern Tang survivor's contribution, by way of Sima Guang, to the Neo-Confucianism that would arise in the next century.

(Proofreader: Li Qi-hong)

⁸⁶ Qin Guan has two texts from 1088 that use this term. One is the “He Sun Zhongcheng Qi” 賀孫中丞啟, which showed his respect for Sun Jue 孫覺 by referring to him as an authentic Confucian; however, he did not make any reference to Emperor Yuan in the piece. Qin Guan, *Huaihai ji* 淮海集, *Sibu congkan chubian*, vol. 209, *hou ji* 後集, *juan* 5, p. 3. The other text is the “Wei Xuancheng lun” 韋玄成論. Qin Guan, *Huaihai ji*, *juan* 19, p. 3. By referring to the conversion between Emperors Xuan and Yuan, Qin divided scholars into two groups – authentic Confucians and rotten scholars. Although there is no direct evidence to confirm that Qin's use of the term was inspired by Sima Guang, his connection with Liu Bin 劉邠 (1022-1088), a scholar who specialized in Han history and a major assistant to Sima when he was compiling *Zizhi tongjian*, indicates that Qin may have learned of Sima's idea through Liu. When Qin was appointed instructor at Cai Prefecture 蔡州 (modern Runan, Henan Province) in 1086, he wrote two poems to Liu. Later in the same year, Liu was appointed to Cai as Prefect. Qin thus had the opportunity to know how the term was used in the *Zizhi tongjian*. For Qin's connections with Liu, see Xu Peijun 徐培均 (ed.), *Qin Shaoyou nianpu changbian* 秦少游年譜長編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), pp. 296, 308.

⁸⁷ Two examples will suffice here. See Wei Liaoweng 魏了翁, “Yiwei qiu qiye teban zoushi 乙未秋七月特班奏事,” in *Heshan xiansheng daquan wenji* 鶴山先生大全文集, *Sibu congkan chubian*, vol. 227, *juan* 20, pp. 2, 3; Yuan Fu 袁甫, “Qianhan Yuandiji zanyue Di shao er haoru ji jiwei zhengyong rusheng wei zhi yi zheng Gong, Xue, Wei, Kuang die wei Zaixiang er shang qianzhi wenyi youyou buduan Xiaoxuan zhi ye shuai yan 前漢元帝紀贊曰帝少而好儒及即位徵用儒生委之以政貢薛韋匡迭為宰相而上牽制文義優游不斷孝宣之業衰焉,” in *Mengzhai ji* 蒙齋集 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1966), *juan* 1, pp. 13-14.

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有限天命之偏霸： 南唐遺民對故國敗亡之政治性與歷史性的反省

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摘 要

本論文探討南唐遺民撰寫的《釣磯立談》，論述該書作者為確立其故國在歷史中占有正當的位置，發展了一系列的概念來記錄、理解、詮釋南唐的歷史。其中最為關鍵的是「偏霸」的概念。此一概念涵攝了有限天命的觀點、對於南唐處境的地緣政治分析、最適於南唐用以與眾多並立政權爭逐天下的計畫等。持著「偏霸」的概念，作者一方面含蓄地駁斥《舊五代史》以「偽」、「僭」界定南唐的敘述；另一方面則斥責南唐第二位君主李璟（943-961 在位）及其朝臣：他們背離了開國君主李昇（937-943 在位）的規劃，從而將國家導向沉淪之途。基於對南唐歷史的反省及批判，作者提出必須聘任、晉用「真儒」來治理國家。因此，《釣磯立談》是一部在北宋初年由遺民寫就的政治性歷史著作。

關鍵詞：南唐，遺民，《釣磯立談》，偏霸，天命

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