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## Article



# Aristocratic Families in the Jianghuai Region during the Tang-Song Interregnum

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### Abstract

With an emphasis on the Jianghuai region, this article aims to study the activities of aristocratic families during the Tang-Song Interregnum. Some aristocratic families managed to survive but were no longer in a position to carry out the cultural functions they had performed during the Tang dynasty. Based on the discussions undertaken by the article, aristocratic families played no evident role in political and cultural domains during the reign of Yang Wu and the Southern Tang. As such, total disappearance of the political and cultural capabilities of this privileged class in the Jianghuai region may have already taken place prior to the founding of the Southern Tang.

### Keywords

aristocratic families – Tang-Jianghuai – Yang Wu – Southern Tang – *Qingliu Wenhua*

## 1 Introduction

As a geographical term commonly used in imperial China, Jianghuai 江淮 in a narrow sense refers to the plains between the Yangtze River 長江 and the Huai River 淮河, roughly in today's Anhui 安徽 and Jiangsu 江蘇. In the context of this article, Jianghuai refers to a much wider geographical domain, which includes the Circuit of Huainan (*Huainan dao* 淮南道), the East Circuit of Jiangnan (*Jiangnan dongdao* 江南東道), and the West Circuit of Jiangnan (*Jiangnan xidao* 江南西道) designated by the Tang regional administrative divisions; the mentioned territories are roughly equivalent to present-day entire of or parts of Anhui, Jiangsu, Jiangxi 江西, Hubei 湖北, and Henan 河南.<sup>1</sup> Founded by Yang Xingmi 楊行密 (851–905), Yang Wu was the first kingdom established in Jianghuai during the Tang-Song Interregnum. When Xu Zhigao 徐知誥 (889–943) founded the Southern Tang, he took over the Yang Wu territories.<sup>2</sup> With an emphasis on the Jianghuai region, this article aims to discuss the political and cultural roles of Tang aristocratic families during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–960). The concept of the “Tang-Song Interregnum” is particularly relevant to the present study. Suggested by Hugh R. Clark, the Tang-Song Interregnum is the framework used to conceptualize events that took place within the concerned period. “Interregnum” is interpreted as a power vacuum, an idea aimed to embody the chaotic situation that characterized the era in question.<sup>3</sup>

During this period, the destiny of aristocratic families varied by region, a truth that brings to light a shortcoming in examining historical continuity of the Tong-Song era simply from the dynastic-oriented perspective, as consciously or unconsciously presented in the concept of Tang-Song Transformation. Unlike the Tang-Song Interregnum concept, which highlights the period as a separate phase with regional characteristics, the more popular perspective

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- 1 On regional administration in the Tang dynasty (618–907), consult article Ng Pak-sheung, “What Happened to Jianghuai during the Tang-Song Interregnum: From Cultural and Social Perspectives,” *Etudes Chinoises* (Forthcoming).
  - 2 On historical details of the Southern Tang, consult Robert J. Krompart, “The Southern restoration of Tang: Counsel, policy and parahistory in the stabilization of the Chiang-Huai region, 887–943” (Ph.D. diss. University of California at Berkeley, 1973); Johannes L. Kurz, *China's Southern Tang Dynasty, 937–976* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011). Kurz's work is the first book officially published in English to provide a comprehensive overview of the Southern Tang and full coverage of military, cultural, and political history.
  - 3 Hugh R. Clark, “Why does the Tang-Song Interregnum matter? A focus on the economies of the South,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 46 (2016): 1–28; “Why does the Tang-Song Interregnum matter? Part Two: The social and cultural initiatives of the South,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 47 (2017–2018): 1–31.

among historians refers to the same period as the Tang-Song Transformation (alternatively, Tang-Song Transition), a concept that presents this same period as one that merely bridges dynasties. One shortcoming of the latter is its failure to address the ways in which various regions across China independently contributed cultural and economic innovations to the period in question. As pointed out by Luo Yanan, “When reading Naito and Miyazaki, for example, we notice the topic of their research was China in its entirety, not the different regions.”<sup>4</sup> The comment reveals the major defect of their works, namely, focusing on the events taking place in dynasties founded in the Great Plain while neglecting regional uniqueness. To address this shortcoming, some scholars have responded by basing their own studies within regional contexts.<sup>5</sup>

To address the defect, Clark has gone further by suggesting the Tang-Song Interregnum concept in examining regional transformation in South China.<sup>6</sup> The concept of exploring regional significance during the interregnum is indeed useful to overcome the weakness in Naitō’s theory: while serving as the framework to illustrate the change and stability in Tang-Song China, Clark’s concept modifies Naitō’s theory by pointing out the importance of regional studies. In this sense, these two theories are not necessarily exclusive, but are mutually supplemental instead.

Different from a common bias that relegates the Five Dynasties to an obscure time span characterized by usurpation, Clark argues that this era constitutes neither a pause nor a regression, but an era of expansion and innovation thus deserving recognition. Following this logic, the significance of Jianghuai during the interregnum might not be confined to affiliation with chaos and destruction, but more importantly, to facilitating positive influences

4 Luo Yanan, “A study of the changes in the Tang-Song Transition model,” *Journal of Song-Yuan studies* 35 (2005), 106. Recently, Chinese scholars have increasingly cast doubt on the validity of the Tang-Song Transition Theory. For details, consult Sun Qi 孫齊, “Editor’s introduction: Limitations of the Tang-Song Transition Theory,” *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 6 (2020): 127–28; Yang Jiping 楊際平, “Dispelling the Myth of the ‘Tang-Song Transition Theory,’” *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 6 (2020): 129–52; Li Huarui 李華瑞, “Time to Turn the Page in Tang and Song History Studies: Exploring the Tang-Song Transformation Theory from Multiple Perspectives,” *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 6 (2020): 153–79; Wang Huayu 王化雨, “A Historical Study of Political System Reform in the Tang and Song Dynasties,” *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 6 (2020): 180–91.

5 For instance, Satake Yasuhiko 佐竹靖彦 has conducted a painstaking study of regional social, political, and military uniqueness and disparities that developed during the chaotic late Tang and the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. For details, consult his book, Satake Yasuhiko 佐竹靖彦, *Tō Sō henkaku no chiikiteki kenkyū* 唐宋變革の地域的研究 (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1990).

6 Clark, “Why does the Tang-Song Interregnum matter?” 30.

on regional cultural enhancement. Based on the cultural contributions of the Southern Tang, this article intends to highlight the point that the contributions demonstrated in the Song dynasty (960–1279) were primarily homegrown, implying that those involved in this endeavor were local intellectuals. This finding widens the dimension for the discussion on the destiny of the Tang aristocratic families, which followed a tragic path to their ultimate demise.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Significance of Literary Tradition in Medieval China

Among the Southern states, the Southern Tang has been credited with having performed a crucial role culturally in Tang-Song China. As observed by Johannes L. Kurz, the preservation of “cultural values and artifacts” from the Tang served as the basis of Song culture, while the culture preserved by the Southern Tang presented the Song “with a direct link to the Tang and its traditions.”<sup>8</sup> Kurz’s observation brings up an important question: who could fulfill the mission as cultural bearer? Based on common perception, Tang aristocrats would be considered those who possessed sufficient cultural acumen to fulfill this role. During medieval China, Tang aristocrats were the key force that integrated political, social, economic, and cultural dynamics.<sup>9</sup> Their cultural importance was manifested in their robust ability to shape cultural norms and values.

Among these culture-shaping features, one can be identified as self-serving, used to achieve the perpetuity of aristocracy. Based on the study of Cui 崔

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- 7 The collapse of the Tang aristocratic families has succeeded in drawing scholarly attention over the years. Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 appears to be the first scholar to issue the theory of center-oriented migration (*qianxi zhongyanghua* 遷徙中央化) and the devastating impact the center-oriented migration pattern had on aristocratic families during the final phase of the Tang. His major elaborations on these issues are collected in his book, Mao Hanguang 毛漢光, *Zhongguo zhonggu shehui shilun* 中國中古社會史論 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshiye gongsi, 1988). Recently, Nicolas Tackett has suggested his distinct viewpoint, specifically, that the impact of dynastic disintegration on this privileged group was not merely confined to their physical existence, but it also affected the social network that had proven essential for maintaining the group’s power. See his book, Nicolas Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014).
- 8 Johannes L. Kurz, *China’s Southern Tang Dynasty, 937–976*. For a similar discussion, see Wei Liangtao 魏良弢, “Nan Tang shiren” 南唐士人, *Jiangsu shehui kexue* 江蘇社會科學, no. 2 (1995): 85–89.
- 9 Li Jianhua 李建華, “Wenzhang shishang zhengkailu fayue Shandong zhuotian – qianlun Tangdai Shandong shizu de wenxue chuanguo” 文章世上爭開路闕闕山東拄破天—淺論唐代山東士族的文學創作, *Gudian wenxue zhishi* 古典文學知識, no. 2 (2014): 49–56.

(Ts'ui) families originating in Qinghe 清河 and Boling 博陵, Chen Jo-Shui 陳弱水 elaborates on the role of culture in the distinction of aristocratic families. Defined by lifestyle and intellectual tendencies, cultural features embodied a refined, morally-oriented behavioral pattern, and a tradition of learning within the family. "If the Ts'ui families of the late-T'ang had, to a significant degree, lost their traditional cultural characteristics, then the cultural distinction between aristocrat and non-aristocrat had disappeared before the actual disappearance of medieval aristocrats." Following this logic, Chen points out the impetus for decline among Tang aristocratic families: "Cultural change was closely related to the decline of these families: consciously or not, in the ninth and tenth centuries they abandoned an important line that had separated them from the rest of society, thereby letting go a major aspect of status."<sup>10</sup> Besides serving as a basis for consolidating family coherence, some literati of aristocratic background, such as Xiao Yingshi 蕭穎士 (717–768), reiterated the need to create a cultural community (*wenhua gongtongti* 文化共同體) substantiated by civilized norm and value for common interest.<sup>11</sup>

The issues discussed above reveal an eye-catching feature, which is the dominant position of aristocratic families in the cultural domain. Recently, a different approach with an emphasis on literary significance has taken place that provides a new perspective on social, political, and cultural dynamics in medieval China. Issued by Lu Yang 陸揚, the *qingliu wenhua* 清流文化 (clear-stream culture) is a framework designed to conceptualize culture as characterized by literary tradition and the historical events closely related to this tradition that prevailed roughly from the 9th century to the end of the

10 Chen Jo-Shui 陳弱水, "Culture as Identity during the T'ang-Sung Transition: The Ch'ing-ho Ts'uis and Po-ling Ts'uis," *Asia Major* 3rd series 9.1–2 (1996), 105–6.

11 Lei Enhai 雷恩海 and Su Liguó 蘇利國, "Lun Tangchao wenhua gongtongti jianshe – yi Xiao Yingshi 'hualì' sixiang wei zhongxin de kaocha" 論唐朝文化共同體建設—以蕭穎士“化理”思想為中心的考察, *Xibeì shìdà xuèbào (shehui kexue ban)* 西北師大學報 (社會科學版), no. 1 (2015): 36–42; Lei Enhai 雷恩海 and Su Liguó 蘇利國, "Lun Tangdai wenhua gongtongti jianshe de biranxing – yi Xiao Yingshi 'hualì' shuo de sixiang yu wenhua yuanyuan weilì" 論唐代文化共同體建設的必然性—以蕭穎士“化理”說的思想與文化淵源為例, *Henan shifan dàxué xuèbào (zhèxué shehui kexue ban)* 河南師範大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) 2 (2017): 121–28. Cultural shaping did not seem to be monopolized by aristocratic families; even local prominent families displayed their interest in this endeavor. With an emphasis on the Duan family in the Linzi region, Xu Zhiyin 許智銀 explores how this family played its role in shaping local culture. For details, consult Xu Zhiyin 許智銀, *Tang dai Linzi Duanshi jiazú wenhua yanjiú* 唐代臨淄段氏家族文化研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013). Regarding academic contributions of this book, see Niu Weidong 牛衛東, "Qiongjiu shili kai xinjing – du Tangdai Linzi Duanshi jiazú wenhua yanjiú" 窮究事理開新境—讀《唐代臨淄段氏家族文化研究》, *Henan keji dàxué xuèbào (shehui kexue ban)* 河南科技大學學報 (社會科學版), no. 2 (2014): 110–12.

10th century. Literally “clear stream,” or scholar-officials reputed for integrity, the *qingliu* in the context of Lu Yang’s study refers to a network formed by those who succeeded in the civil service examinations, obtained recommendations from high-ranking officials, held bureaucratic careers, and/or formed marriage relations with politically significant families. Accordingly, the *qingliu wenhua* can be comprehended as culture created and nurtured by the interactions between those categorized as part of the *qingliu* group. The importance of literary writings with elegant words (*wenci* 文詞) had been enthusiastically admired by scholars in medieval China, which enabled men of letters to distinguish themselves in political, social, and cultural aspects. This mindset was certainly a major force that led to a superior position enjoyed by the *qingliu* group. Consequently, the *qingliu* group monopolized the discourse of power that fundamentally shaped contemporary culture and politics.<sup>12</sup>

When anglicizing the book title, Lu Yang uses a rather modern term in *Literocracy and Empire: Study of Political Culture of the Tang Dynasty*. The term literocracy has been widely used in the study of language and social sciences.<sup>13</sup> Comparatively, as used in historical studies, the term seems to make better sense. In his study of archives and archival systems in Pharaonic Egypt, Paul Delsalle defines literocracy as a society in which literacy and the writing of documents marked the exercise of political and administrative authority.<sup>14</sup> Delsalle’s definition sheds light on how literary activities pertained to the running of a government. Comparing the Chinese and English versions of the abstract for Lu’s book, literocracy obviously corresponds to the *qingliu wenhua*, which implies how Lu understands ways in which Tang politics was influenced by literocracy. As elaborated in his book, literary writings were the essential factor in shaping the power and identity of the high political cultural elite. Then, who could be identified as part of the specified elite?

The core members in the *qingliu* group included the officials with literary talent (*cichen* 詞臣) and their families. In the context of the *qingliu wenhua*, the term *cichen* refers to the officials, particularly Hanlin academicians (*Hanlin*

12 For details, consult Lu Yang 陸揚, *Qingliu wenhua yu Tang diguo* 清流文化與唐帝國 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2016).

13 Maisha T Fisher, “Building a Literocracy: Diaspora Literacy and Heritage Knowledge in Participatory Literacy Communities,” *The Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* 105.2 (2006): 361–81; Raphael d’Abdon, “Teaching Spoken Word Poetry as a Tool for Decolonizing and Africanizing the South African Curricula and Implementing ‘Literocracy,’” *Scrutiny* 2 21.2 (2016): 44–62.

14 On evidence used to substantiate the argument, consult Paul Delsalle, *A History of Archival Practice*, trans. Margaret Procter (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 1–16.

*xueshi* 翰林學士), who served the emperor on the basis of their literary ability and performance. Structurally, social backgrounds of the *cichen* were diverse. Despite the general understanding that members from aristocratic families would have far more chances for recruitment by the Tang government, some *cichen* were of much lesser privilege. Taking Hanlin academicians as examples, Lu Zhi 陸贄 (754–805) was from an aristocratic family while Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 (678–740), who served the position of academician awaiting orders (*Hanlin daizhao* 翰林待詔), was from a humble family originating in Shaozhou 韶州, a place that had been commonly relegated to the outer fringe of civilization (*huawai zhi di* 化外之地).

As defined by Zhang Jiuling, literary value should be demonstrated by two factors, namely, success in passing the *jinshi* examinations 進士試 and service in positions known as purity and importance (*qingyao* 清要) in terms of rank and office. These two factors formed the standard with which society would judge whom to identify as elite. The suggested standard replaced the traditional one that focused on local nobility (*junwang* 郡望) and official rank (*guanpin* 官品). Of humble background, Zhang had good reason to advocate replacing conventional standards with the new criteria in which professional awareness and identity transcended descent, while aristocratic predominance had been a norm that prevailed since the Wei, Jin, Northern, and Southern dynasties (220–589).

Although the *qingliu wenhua* had already been developed before the An-Shi Rebellion 安史之亂 (755–763), Tang Dezong 唐德宗 (r. 779–805) was the first emperor after the Rebellion to reorganize the ruling mechanism in a way that provided more room for the *qingliu wenhua* to perpetuate their influence. Definitely, the emperor was significantly concerned with the agenda of strengthening imperial authority. Against this background, reviving the role played by the *cichen* was only part of his scheme, while eunuchs were also considered an essential force instrumental in bolstering imperial authority during the time when he was driven out from Chang'an 長安 in a mutiny in 782. As a result, the power of the *cichen* and eunuchs was institutionalized, which eventually played a tremendous role in shaping Tang politics until the dynasty came to an end.

Rather than referring to an authentic political bloc, Lu Yang attributes the *qingliu* to a social or cultural group. To judge the exact nature of the *qingliu*, one must understand their job responsibility. Their major duty involved drafting imperial decrees (*zhaoling* 詔令). Writings were essential to imperial rule, as conveyance of government decree and policy required facilitation by documentation. Literary value was thus highlighted by a traditional belief in a close linkage between writing and authority, which necessitated that imperial rule

be substantiated by the writing of government decree. Shaping the societal mindset for norms and values was also an endeavor that required documentation. As discussed by Chen Zhijian in his review of Lu Yang, the *qingliu* and the *qingliu wenhua* fall within the political history domain. In fact, politics was always the core issue in the history of imperial China. As such, studying the writing of imperial decrees and the *cichen* group from a political perspective should be used to demonstrate the significance of the issue.<sup>15</sup>

Chen Zhijian's point of view is well substantiated by the study of Chinese bureaucracy. As argued by Hai Yunzhi 海云志, formation of the bureaucratic mechanism in ancient China was closely linked with its writing system.<sup>16</sup> The linkage can certainly explain the perpetuity of elite literacy in imperial China, which was manifested in the governance of a small group of civil officials who possessed such a high level of literate competence to formulate the administrative pattern as prescribed by literocracy. Besides civil officials with adequate literary competence, emperors used writing to shape the ruling pattern as well as establish social norms and value.<sup>17</sup>

Due to the needs of the *fanzhen* 藩鎮, literally, military domains ruled by military governors (*jiedushi* 節度使), and various military blocs, the combination of literary writings and political usefulness enhanced the literati's worthiness during the late Tang and the Five Dynasties. Against this background, the turbulent era did not weaken the important role previously performed by the

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- 15 In addition to adopting a political perspective in discussing the nature of the *qingliu* and the *qingliu wenhua*, Chen Zhijian 陳志堅 raises additional issues, thus making his review comprehensive and providing readers with needed information for a better understanding of the book. For details, see Chen Zhijian 陳志堅, "Lu Yang *Qingliu wenhua yu Tang diguo*" 陸揚清流文化與唐帝國, *Tang Song lishi pinglun* 唐宋歷史評論, no. 3 (2017): 334–49. Also based on Lu Yang's book, Li Hongbin 李鴻賓 focuses more on the interactions between the civil and the military, one of the major dynamics instrumental in shaping the elite culture in Tang-Song China. See Chen Zhijian, "Lu Yang *Qingliu wenhua yu Tang diguo*," 323–33.
- 16 Hai Yunzhi 海雲志, "Tingshu congshi: Zhongguo zaoqi de shuxie xitong yu guanliaozhi xingcheng" 聽書從事：中國早期的書寫系統與官僚制形成, *Zhengzhixue yanjiu* 政治學研究, no. 6 (2020): 46–56.
- 17 The history of the Ming dynasty offers many events that demonstrate how writings could be used by the emperors to tighten their control on officials and society as a whole. For details, consult Yang Yifan 楊一凡, *Ming Dagao yanjiu* 明大誥研究 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1988); Luo Bingmian 羅炳綿, "Ming taizu de wenzi tongzhishu" 明太祖的文字統治術, *Zhongguo xueren* 中國學人, no. 3 (1971): 37–51; Qiu Zhonglin 邱仲麟, "Jinglao shi suoyi jianlao – Mingdai xiangyin jiuli de bianqian ji qi yu difang shehui de hudong" 敬老適所以賤老—明代鄉飲酒禮的變遷及其與地方社會的互動, *Zhongyong yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 76.1 (2005): 1–77.



*qingliu wenhua*; instead, it spread from the central government to regional establishments, as indicated by imitations of literary practices by the *fanzhen*. Imitations could be found not only in the *fanzhen* that were on good terms with the central government, but also those located in Hebei 河北, infamous for generations-long rebellions.<sup>18</sup>

The rosy picture strengthens the argument that, due to the uniqueness and proliferation of the *qingliu wenhua*, those who possessed outstanding literary skill could preserve their advantage during social and political upheaval. The basic reason was that all regimes wanted to be legitimized and glorified, and literary ability had been considered a key to achieving the goal. As a result, the literati became indispensable to regimes even in chaotic periods. However, Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南 views the issue from a different perspective. On the one hand, literary ability during chaotic periods was considered practical; on the other hand, whether serving in central government or local administration, civil officials had to face significant adversity in order to survive.<sup>19</sup>

Timeframe plays a substantial role in the arguments presented above. Since dynasties had short lifespans, the careers of many officials, if not abruptly eliminated through purges, could continue across different regimes characterized with totally different ruling patterns. Taking the career of Fan Zhi 范質 (911–964) as an example, Fan once served as Hanlin academician in the Later Jin (936–947); he would also enjoy a prosperous career even in the Later Han (947–951), a dynasty notorious for bloody persecutions and merciless penalties. Even though Fan succeeded in his career during the Later Han, he would not take pride in it. There were remarkable discrepancies between cruel administration and the Confucian training that emphasized benevolence in governing people.<sup>20</sup> Facing the grim reality, Fan basically lacked the means to turn the tide and had to concede to new ways in order to avoid a political purge.

After the founding of the Later Zhou (951–960), Fan Zhi could relax once more. Comparatively speaking, Zhou Taizu 周太祖 (r. 951–954) was well aware of the importance of promoting culture and education and cautious in using penalties.<sup>21</sup> Before founding his dynasty, Guo had already shown much

18 Wu Liyu 吳麗娛, “Lüe lun biao zhuang jian qi shu yi wen ji yu wan tang wu dai zheng zhi” 略論表狀箋啓書儀文集與晚唐五代政治, *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo xueqian* 中國社會科學院歷史研究所學刊, no. 2 (2004): 339–59.

19 Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南, *Zuzong zhi fa: Bei Song qianqi zhengzhi shulue (xiuding ban)* 祖宗之法: 北宋前期政治述略 (修訂版) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2014), 126, 131.

20 Regarding the image of Fan Zhi's cautious application of penalty, see Shao Bowen 邵伯濫, *Shaoshi wenjian lu* 邵氏聞見錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 62.

21 Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 290.9450–51.

appreciation for Fan's literary skill and the judgment Fan had demonstrated in the imperial edict drafted by himself. Based on such merits, Guo praised Fan to have the acumen for a grand councilor. When Guo came to the throne, he promoted Fan to the position of grand councilor.<sup>22</sup>

Besides the brutal ruling pattern that frustrated Fan Zhi, the tense relationship between the civil and the military was another point of constraint. During the reign of the Later Han, the real power was firmly grasped by a handful of military and political elite who held deep resentment against civil officials; under the circumstances, civil officials were marginalized and vulnerable to unexpected purges. The ruling elite's negative view of the literati was well demonstrated by comments made by Shi Hongzhao 史弘肇 (d. 950): "Literati (*wenren* 文人) were difficult to endure; they despised us, calling us soldiers. Detestable! Detestable!"<sup>23</sup> Yang Bin 楊邠 (d. 950) was good at administrative affairs (*lishi* 吏事) but lacked the discernment to appreciate the highest principles of propriety. He claimed that administering the country required a plentiful state treasury (*tangcang fengying* 帑藏豐盈) and powerful soldiers in armor (*jiabing qiangsheng* 甲兵強盛), while literary writings as well as rites and music (*wenzhang liyue* 文章禮樂) were unpractical and not worth mentioning.<sup>24</sup>

Similar to Yang Bin, Wang Zhang 王章 (d. 950) disliked Confucian scholars (*rushi* 儒士). In a conversation, the two high-ranking officials mocked Confucian scholars, musing that if given an abacus, they simply would not know the head from the end. "Of what use are they?"<sup>25</sup> Based on the quoted conversation, it is clear that the usefulness of civil officials was just confined to the domains directly related with the survival of the dynasty; culture had nothing to do with it. Unlike Shi Hongzhao, who started out as a soldier, both Wang Zhang and Yang Bin began their careers as petty officials (*li* 吏) in local administration, implying that they were educated to a certain degree.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the essence of the confrontation was not one of uneducated military vs. educated civil officials, but of their different understanding on how to administer the country.

22 *Songshi* 宋史, 249.8793–8794. On major life events of Fan Zhi, consult Ng, Pak-sheung, "Jie erzhi babaizi yu Fan Zhi shengping kaoshu: Lun Bei Song jiaxunshi de shehui gongneng ji shiliao jiazhi" "誠兒姪八百字" 與范質生平考述: 論北宋家訓詩的社會功能及史料價值, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 NS no. 11 (2002): 151–96.

23 *Jiu Wudaishi* 舊五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 107.1405.

24 *Ibid.*, 107.1408–09.

25 *Ibid.*, 107.1410.

26 *Ibid.*, 107.1408–09.

Chaos was only part of Chinese history; the time for the *qingliu wenhua* to prosper came again after the founding of the Song dynasty. Nevertheless, the *qingliu wenhua* came to an abrupt end during the reign of Song Renzong 宋仁宗 (r. 1022–1063). According to the observation of Lu Yang, discontinuity of this Tang heritage was caused by a new set of norms and values nurtured by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and the Song literati. Despite their multi-layered associations with the *qingliu wenhua* in their upbringing and learning processes, they eventually developed their own perspective in identifying the role of the literati; preserving the virtue of loyalty was highlighted in this endeavor. As such, Feng Dao 馮道 (882–954) was sharply criticized for having served a total of five dynasties, namely the Later Tang, the Later Jin, the Liao 遼 (907–1125), the Later Han, and the Later Zhou, as dragging out an ignoble existence. Denial of Feng's political flexibility at the expense of loyalty reflected the new belief in Song China, marking the end of the *qingliu wenhua*.

After Lu Yang's book was published, the concept of the *qingliu wenhua* received fairly positive feedback, as indicated by the reviews previously cited. The new findings reveal the nature of the Tang's political elite, thereby providing a framework that affords historians an alternative with which to conceptualize the related events and dynamics in Tang-Song China. Prior to the book's publication, the Tang-Song Transformation concept suggested by Naitō Konan 內藤湖南 (1866–1934) provided a major conceptual framework. Another approach was framed by Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969), who interpreted the confrontations between officials of aristocratic and humble backgrounds as the origin of the Tang's factional struggles. Since Lu Yang's conceptual framework includes officials of different backgrounds and thereby removes class distinction, major challenges to Chen's theory are highly anticipated.

In brief, introduction of the *qingliu wenhua* signifies Lu Yang's attempt to create a new conceptual framework with the potential to take the study of Tang history to a higher stage. Academically speaking, a fresh start (*lingqi luzao* 另起爐灶) is always praiseworthy, for the move can bear the effect of pushing out the old and bringing in the new (*tuichen chuxin* 推陳出新). However, like all other well-proven, influential conceptual frameworks, the *qingliu wenhua* would require a series of refinements and modifications before it can satisfactorily be substantiated and be able to gain recognition. In this regard, identification of officials with high repute (*qingguan* 清官) in the Tang bureaucracy is particularly needed to strengthen the validity of this conceptual framework, as suggested by Chen Zhijian.

Another issue concerns how the impact of literary writings and *jinshi* examinations are interpreted from a different perspective. Instead of serving as the factors that formed the *qingliu wenhua*, they could be the reasons for

the decline of aristocratic families. As argued by Chen Jo-Shui, deterioration of cultural identity was linked to their involvement in the *jinshi* examinations and literary writings. Obviously, Chen attempts to link the decline of aristocratic families to internal decadence caused by cultural change.<sup>27</sup> From the perspective of the *qingliu wenhua*, Chen's argument certainly poses a challenge to the validity of the conceptual framework. First, Chen's association of literary writings with the decline of aristocratic families sounds detrimental to the theory of how the *wen* served as the medium to cement the officials of different social backgrounds to form a particular elite group. Second, if pursuing literary writings proved devastating to aristocratic families, one would struggle to imagine how a group identity that transcended social distinctions could be created and consolidated.

In addition to discussion on the viability of the *qingliu wenhua* as a conceptual framework, how to extend the scope of scrutiny to obtain more evidence should be of significance. During the reign of the Southern Tang, the *cichen* played a dominant role in running the kingdom administration and formulating national policy. Therefore, whether or not the Southern Tang's experiences alone can sufficiently sustain the conceptual framework of the *qingliu wenhua* is worthy of particular attention.

### 3 Cultural Role Played by Aristocratic Families in the Jianghuai Region

Again referring to Kurz's observation, one might reasonably deduce that aristocratic families played a significant role in cultural continuity in Tang-Song China. However, actual events reveal another story. This academic issue calls for examination of two very basic questions: Were aristocratic families able to continue their cultural significance in the Jianghuai region after the collapse of the Tang? And during the Tang-Song Interregnum, who exactly was responsible for cultural preservation and continuity during the rule of the Southern Tang? These two questions are explored within the section that follows.

Prior to the Sui-Tang era, the major source of literati and talent was located in the regions north of the Yangtze River, particularly Guanzhong 關中 and

27 Chen Jo-Shui, "Culture as identity during the Tang-Sung Transition," 127. Certainly, this is a meaningful approach with potential to better demonstrate the interplay of various dynamics that led to the final end of the aristocratic families. However, this new argument can hardly be conclusive at this point due to very limited samples – only two to be exact.

Shandong 山東.<sup>28</sup> Since the mid-Tang era, the wealthy and stable Southeast region became a central destination for migration.<sup>29</sup> Among those who moved to Southeast China were some aristocratic families, literati, and officials. Their immigration enlarged the scale of educated people and facilitated an upgrade to the cultural quality of the region.<sup>30</sup> During the late Tang period, there were new causes for the abundance of literati in Jianghuai: Those who fled to Jianghuai to avoid disturbances,<sup>31</sup> and those serving in Jianghuai who found themselves unable to return to the North due to war and chaos and were forced to remain in the prefectures in which they served.<sup>32</sup>

From a utilitarian perspective, aristocrats may not have been useful to local strongmen, but they would theoretically be welcomed by the founders of the southern kingdoms. Wang Jian 王建 (847–918), founder of the Former Shu 前蜀 (907–925), was an example. According to *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, “At this time, many of the families of the great officials (*yiguan zhizu* 衣冠之族) had fled to Shu to avoid the chaos, and the Lord of Shu [Wang Jian] treated them with courtesy and utilized them.”<sup>33</sup> Since the Shu region was both geographically

- 28 On the territorial domain of Shandong, consult Xiao Jinhua 蕭錦華, “Sui-Tang shidai ‘Shandong’ yongyu zhi zhengzhi, shehui, jingji, wenhua hanyi” 隋唐時代“山東”用語之政治、社會、經濟、文化涵義, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 NS no.12 (2003): 13–67.
- 29 Concerning how turbulence in North China, such as the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), drove aristocratic families to South China, consult Wu Songdi 吳松弟, “Tang houqi Wudai Jiangnan diqu de beifang yimin” 唐後期五代江南地區的北方移民, in *Zhongguo lishi dili luncong* 中國歷史地理論叢 (Xi’an: Shenxi renmin chubanshe, 1996): 3: 59–94.
- 30 Concerning the profound impact on Southeast China caused by the widespread migration trend during the late Tang and the Five Dynasties, such as the driving forces for local developments, categorization and organization of migrants, and interactions between new migrants and locals, consult Gu Licheng 顧立誠, *Zouxiang nanfang: Tang Song zhiji zibei xiangnan de yimin yuqi yingxiang* 走向南方: 唐宋之際自北向南的移民與其影響 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue, 2004).
- 31 For instance, Liu Chongyuan 劉崇遠 (fl. 924), author of *Jinhuaizi* 金華子, sought refuge to Jiangnan when the Huang Chao Rebellion 黃巢之亂 (875–884) broke out. He served the Southern Tang after his middle-age years. Consult Tao Min 陶敏, “Liu Chongyuan ji qi zhezuo kaolue” 劉崇遠及其著作考略, *Yunmeng xuekan* 雲夢學刊, no. 6 (2006): 106–8.
- 32 During the Song, when some locals traced their ancestry back to the late Tang and the Five Dynasties, they usually linked their family ties to the North. Here are some examples for reference: Liu Shu 劉恕 (1032–1078) claimed Wannien 萬年, a county in Chang’an, as his family’s homeland. Liu Du 劉度, his ancestor of the sixth generation who then served as magistrate of Linchuan 臨川, could not return to his native place because of the war. After death, Liu Du was buried in Junzhou 筠州, a prefecture that the family thereafter claimed as its native place. See Fan Zuyu 范祖禹, “Mishucheng Liu jun mujie” 秘書丞劉君墓碣, in *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, ed. Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 and Liu Lin 劉琳 et al. (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1988–1994), 98:2149–315.
- 33 Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 266.8685.

protected by natural barriers and economically plentiful, many scholar-officials fled there seeking shelter against anarchy. Although Wang Jian had once been a bandit, he was courteous and respectful to the scholarly. Consequently, he succeeded in recruiting those from renowned aristocratic families: Wei Zhuang 韋莊 (836–910), the grandson of Wei Jiansu 韋見素 (697–762); and Zhang Ge 張格 (d. 927), son of Zhang Jun 張濬 (d. 904). More than one hundred other scholar-officials, including Song Pin 宋珖 (dates unknown), were entrusted with positions in office.<sup>34</sup>

Wang Jian, like most of the contemporary regime founders, was *wulai* 無賴 of humble origin and did not have taste for aristocratic families;<sup>35</sup> what interested him was their administrative skill. As explained by Hugh Clark, “Wang Jian employed civil officials who had learned their craft under the civil traditions of the Tang dynasty, and they carried those traditions with them.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, not all aristocratic families necessarily disappeared with the Tang in the metropolitan areas (*Jingji* 京畿), as a substantial number among this contingency would continue to survive and even prosper.

Besides Wang Jian, “many more examples of this trend in recruitment for the early southern states could be given. Biographical information survives from everyone of the southern kingdoms on scholars who had fled the chaos of the north for the greater tranquility of the south and wound up serving a southern lord.”<sup>37</sup> Clark’s assertion is substantiated by the recruitment policies implemented by the founders of other southern states, as follows:

Qian Liu 錢鏐 (852–932), founder of Wu Yue 吳越 (907–978)<sup>38</sup>

Wang Shenzhi 王審知 (862–925), founder of Min 閩 (909–945)<sup>39</sup>

Liu Yan 劉龔 (889–942), founder of the Southern Han 南漢 (917–971)<sup>40</sup>

Ma Yin 馬殷 (853–930), founder of Chu 楚 (927–951)<sup>41</sup>

34 *Xin Wudai shi*, 63, 787.

35 For details, consult Hugh R. Clark, “Scoundrels, Rogues, and Refugees: The Founders of the Ten Kingdoms in the Late Ninth Century,” in *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms*, ed. Peter Allan Lorge (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), 47–77.

36 Hugh Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms between the Tang and the Song,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, pt. 1: “The Song Dynasty and Its Precursors” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 164. Also consult Wang Hongjie, “The Civil Pursuits of a Military Man in Tenth-century China,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 40 (2010), 10.

37 Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms Between the Tang and the Song,” 162.

38 *Xin Wudaishi* 新五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 67, 837.

39 *Ibid.*, 68, 846.

40 *Ibid.*, 65, 810–812.

41 *Ibid.*, 66, 824.

The above information does not include Yang Xingmi 楊行密 (852–905), founder of Yang Wu, simply because he did nothing to recruit respectable literati during his rule.<sup>42</sup> This historical event totally contradicts a common understanding that Jianghuai traditionally had been known for cultural attainments.<sup>43</sup> In this case, the Southern Tang's role in cultural preservation cannot be taken for granted, as Yang Wu, predecessor of the Southern Tang, was the regime in which brutal acts and disdain for cultural tradition prevailed. As a result, Jianghuai was the last region to engage in massive recruitment of educated people into the government, compared with the above kingdoms.

Different from Yang Xingmi's neglect in culture and education (*wenjiao* 文教), Xu Zhigao 徐知誥 (889–943), founder of the Southern Tang, enacted drastic policy changes while in power. Among the changes, his eagerness to achieve “civil transformation” (*wenzhi zhuanhua* 文質轉化) is most noteworthy in the context of this article; the concept refers to a shift in the regime's nature from one of military domination to one with civil officials in authority.<sup>44</sup> Benefiting from civil transformation, scholar-officials accordingly created more room for themselves to play an active role in civil administration (*wenzhi* 文治), or governance characterized by culture, education, rites, and music as elaborated by the Chinese Classics.<sup>45</sup>

42 Ibid., 61.747–752. Regarding the social background for those who were included in Yang Xingmi's bloc, consult Ng Pak-sheung, “On Yang Xingmi's bloc – With an Emphasis on Socio-political Setting, Subjugation, and Subordination,” *T'oung Pao* 107 (2021): 40–94.

43 Numerous works mention cultural developments in South China during the Tang dynasty, which may be interpreted as indication that rich cultural disposition in the Jianghuai region enabled the Southern Tang to effectively fulfill the mission as a cultural preserver. Consult Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, “Tangren xiye shanlin zhi fengshang” 唐人習業山林之風尚, in *Yan Gengwang shixue lunwen xuanji* 嚴耕望史學論文選集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 1: 271–316; Liu Jianming 劉健明, “Tangdai Jiangxi keju de fazhan ji qi tezheng kaojiu” 唐代江西科舉的發展及其特徵考究, *Mudanjiang shifan xueyuan xuebao* (*zhexue shehui kexue ban*) 牡丹江師範學院學報 (哲學社會科學版), no. 4 (2012): 43–47; Wang Chengwen 王承文, “Tang houqi Lingnan keju jinshi yu wenhua fazhan lunkao” 唐後期嶺南科舉進士與文化發展論考, *Jinan shixue* 暨南史學, no. 1 (2018): 29–60.

44 Civil transformation of the Southern Tang has become an academic issue that attracts scholarly attention. Huang Tingshuo, for instance, dedicates his masters thesis to this issue. Instead of using civil transformation, Huang adopts the term “scholarization of bureaucrats” to explain circumstances under which local literati became the most powerful group in the Southern Tang. For details, see Huang Tingshuo 黃庭碩, “Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi – yi Yang Wu, Nan Tang wei zhongxin” 唐宋之際的東南士人與政治—以楊吳、南唐為中心 (Master thesis, National Taiwan University, 2013).

45 Krompart appears to be the first scholar to use the term civil administration to refer to Xu Zhigao's policy. See Robert J. Krompart, “The southern restoration of T'ang,” 228.

In contrast to the military-dominated reign of Yang Wu, civil transformation and civil administration implemented by the Southern Tang functioned like two sides of a coin that signified the evolution towards civil authority. Following in proper order and advancing gradually, civil transformation and civil administration developed in complementary ways; the higher the degree of civil transformation Southern Tang rulers achieved, the greater the opportunity to manipulate establishment of an organized and efficient bureaucracy by filling all existing vacancies in the central and local administrative structures with civil officials. Likewise, realization of civil administration would in turn intensify the progress of civil transformation for the regime.<sup>46</sup>

Ideal conditions for civil administration could be created through the successful transformation, conducted in a civil way, of a regime accustomed to military domination. Since military force played a decisive role in the founding of most dynasties in imperial China at their onset, almost every dynasty profoundly emphasized military significance, as vividly demonstrated in policy-making and administration. Yet whereas military means were unquestionably essential to a dynasty's founding, this was no longer the case once the dynasty was established; instead, civil transformation would at that point become sorely needed in order for the dynasty to achieve stability and prosperity. Civil administration could eventually be shaped only under the condition that sufficient time had passed, which would allow for the dynasty to undergo transformation. Such a condition did not exist within the Five Dynasties, as every dynasty within this era had a short timespan: the Later Liang spanned the longest at sixteen years, while the Later Han was the shortest at only four. The short duration's most direct impact on administration was that none of these dynasties had sufficient time to transform themselves from a military to a civil state. As a result, all of the regimes during the Five Dynasties era remained in similar states to what they had been during the time their rivals eliminated them.<sup>47</sup>

As such, aristocratic families would have no viable chance to regain their privileges in the dynasties founded in North China. The only hope for aristocratic families could be found in southern kingdoms. However, southern kingdoms were not on an equal footing and needed to be differentiated according to lifespan and stability. Although all listed kingdoms apart from

46 On details of interconnection between civil transformation and civil administration, consult Ng Pak-sheung, "On civil transformation of the Southern Tang: Recruitment of literati and subsequent realization of civil administration," *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies* 70.1 (2022): 131–63.

47 On details of major historical events during the period of the Five Dynasties, consult chapters contributed by Standen and Clark in *The Cambridge History of China*, 5: 1.38–205.



Wu Yue, had initially surpassed the Jianghuai region, their influences would not last long. The Former Shu was annexed by the Later Tang in 925; Min and Chu were defeated by the Southern Tang in 945 and 951, respectively; and the Southern Han was seriously hindered by political corruption.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, the Southern Tang could enjoy long-term stability and prosperity until the war with the Later Zhou in 955. As a whole, cultural rejuvenation of the Jianghuai region served as a solid basis for enabling the Southern Tang to perpetuate civil transformation and civil administration. One important way to achieve the goal was to bureaucratize the ruling mechanism, which would certainly benefit those of aristocratic background who possessed a cultural disposition to contribute to the regime and the administrative skill to carry out their duties.

In addition to the need to staff the ruling mechanism with civil officials, optimism among aristocratic families could be further stimulated by the image portrayed by Xu Zhigao. Although Xu was of humble origin, he displayed a keen interest in portraying himself as a descendant of the Tang imperial family. In addition to reiterating his enthusiasm in restoring the Tang system, Xu fabricated his family genealogy as a means to link himself to the Tang in order to help establish his claims to Tang heritage.<sup>49</sup> Under the circumstances, ample opportunity should have existed for aristocratic families to gain appointments. Nevertheless, reality proved otherwise in the formation of the Southern Tang political and cultural elite.

A major indicator that proves the role of aristocratic families in Jianghuai was their participation in the civil service examinations. Since the mid-Tang onward, perpetuation of aristocratic families counted on three interconnected components for achieving success in the civil service examinations, and the *jinshi* degree in particular was one of them. Given the traditional practice, the percentage of candidates from aristocratic families who succeeded in passing the examinations was directly correlated with this privileged group's prospects for preserving their dominant role in society. Regarding the backgrounds of those who succeeded in the *jinshi* examination since the tenth year of the Baoda reign, Huang Tingshuo has contributed significantly through his painstaking efforts to compile a comprehensive list. Surprisingly, the study conducted by Huang indicates that among successful candidates of the *jinshi* examination, not one had an aristocratic family background.<sup>50</sup> In this sense,

48 Clark, "The Southern Kingdoms Between the Tang and the Song," 140–58.

49 Johannes L. Kurz, "On the Southern Tang Imperial Genealogy," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014), 601–20.

50 Huang Tingshuo, "Tang Song zhiji de dongnan shiren yu zhengzhi," 198–202, and Appendix 10: Nan Tang jinshi dengdi renwubiao 南唐進士登第人物表, 302–5.

successful candidates of humble background, rather than of aristocratic origin, could solely benefit from the examination system as an entry point into bureaucracy and as a means to consequently honor and bring prosperity to their families.

Absence from taking the civil service examinations was tantamount to depriving aristocratic families of the means to facilitate the continuity of privileges; lacking bureaucratic careers, this privileged class could not maintain their superior position. This assumption is substantiated by the non-existence of aristocratic families in the highest political echelon, as follows:

Name	Place of origin	Aristocratic background
Song Qiqiu 宋齊丘 (887–959)	Yuzhang 豫章	Nil
Feng Yansi 馮延巳 (903–960)	Guangling 廣陵	Nil
Feng Yanlu 馮延魯 (905–972)	Guangling	Nil
Wei Cen 魏岑 (dates unknown)	Xucheng 須城	Nil
Chen Jue 陳覺 (dates unknown)	Hailing 海陵	Nil
Cha Wenhui 查文徽 (885–954)	Xiuning 休寧	Nil

Song Qiqiu was the leader among the most powerful political bloc; the others, negatively termed the “Five Ghosts” (*wugui* 五鬼) by contemporaries, served as core members. None of them were affiliated with Tang aristocratic families in the slightest. Sun Sheng 孫晟 (d. 956), the group’s arch enemy who originated in Gaomi 高密, was also unaffiliated with aristocracy.

The cultural domain is another avenue through which one can assess the vitality of aristocratic families in Jianghuai during the Tang-Song Interregnum. Serving as a base for cultural preservation and development necessitated that the Southern Tang possess sufficient economic strength and socio-political stability in the first place. In contrast to dynasties founded in North China that were constantly plagued by chaos and brutal administration, the Southern Tang enjoyed a considerable period of stability that was only interrupted when the kingdom was at war with the Later Zhou and its final defeat at the hand of the Northern Song. Besides stability, the Southern Tang possessed optimal conditions for economic growth, such as an ideal geographical setting, an efficient irrigation system inherited from the Tang, and something even more important: a stable society and administration. As a result, the Southern Tang could be rivaled only by Wu Yue in terms of economic prosperity and stability.

Substantiated by robust economic strength and measures to promote culture and education – efforts continually implemented throughout its rule – the Southern Tang earned repute for its cultural attainments, but such merit morphed into fuel for antagonizing the Song. Immediately following its founding, the Northern Song continued to cling to cultural traditions characterized by simple, unadorned, militant, and unrestrained styles that originated in the late Tang and the Five Dynasties (907–960). If erudition, literary cultivation, and refinement were considered key components in defining great culture, then the Southern Tang's advantage over the early Northern Song in this aspect proved outstanding. Cultural discrepancy signified limitations in the extent to which the Song achieved victory; despite the fact that the Southern Tang territories were entirely overtaken by the Song, the defeat of the Southern Tang was solely confined to political and military aspects, while its cultural edge remained intact.

Facing cultural inferiority, some Song literati embraced Southern Tang culture and wished to incorporate it into its own dynasty. Those who were agitated by the unconquered cultural domain managed to outmatch Southern Tang literati; famous men of letters of the Southern Tang had thus become their opposing force (*jiaxiangdi* 假想敵). Restricted by unadorned and militant fashions that generally prevailed during the initial period of the dynastic founding, Song literati could not match them in the domain of culture (*wenhua jiaoliang* 文化較量). In the context of this article, *Wenhua jiaoliang* is defined as the persistent competition between the Song and the Southern Tang primarily in the domains of literary expression, cultural attitude, erudition, the ruler's acumen, and the ruling pattern. In the course of competition, several literati from the Southern Tang were consistently identified by their Song counterparts as major targets for sharp criticism, as follows:

Name	Place of origin	Aristocratic background
Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916–991)	Guangling 廣陵	Nil
Xu Kai 徐鍇 (920–974)	Guangling	Nil
Yin Chongyi 殷崇義 (Later renamed as Tang Yue 湯悅, 912–984)	Qingyang 青陽	Nil
Zhang Ji 張洎 (934–997)	Quanjiao 全椒	Nil
Wu Shu 吳淑 (947–1002)	Danyang 丹陽	Nil
Yang Yi 楊億 (974–1020)	Pucheng 浦城	Nil
Feng Yansi 馮延巳 (903–960)	Guangling	Nil

(cont.)

Name	Place of origin	Aristocratic background
Diao Kan 刁衍 (945–1013)	Shengzhou 昇州	Nil
Pan You 潘佑 (938–973)	Youzhou 幽州	Nil
Jiang Wei 江為 (dates unknown)	Songzhou 宋州	Nil

In early Song China, the goal of the cultural competition was to overwhelm the Southern Tang's cultural advantage by militancy. Therefore, some Song literati counted on their superior political and military strength to overcome their opponents as a way to strengthen dynastic-political legitimacy and cultural identity. The course of *wenhua jiaoliang* changed once cultural deposits made by the Song had accumulated enough, as indicated by the appearance of a new trend that emerged in the mid-Song era among rulers and the literati: the contest switched from one of a military to a cultural nature in order to secure a thorough victory. From then on, *wenhua jiaoliang* remained ongoing, but the focus shifted to a refinement and erudition previously monopolized by the Southern Tang.<sup>51</sup> Another point worthy of scholarly attention is the background of those listed in the table; that none among them came from aristocracy sufficiently signifies that local literati exclusively facilitated the shaping of the Southern Tang culture and its interactions with Song China, whereas Tang aristocratic families played no evident role in this regard.

Besides cultural competition, the roles played by Southern Tang *peichen* 陪臣 (subsidiary officials) in literary and ritual-oriented matters can further reveal the position held by aristocratic families in cultural continuity during the Tang-Song era. Compared with those of other southern kingdoms, Southern Tang rulers deliberately tended to highlight their superior status as the descendants of the Tang dynasty.<sup>52</sup> This fabricated propaganda necessitated that the regime compete with dynasties founded in the Central Plain in order to secure legitimacy; working whole-heartedly on the restoration of

51 Ng Pak-sheung, "Cultural interactions and competitions: The case of the Song dynasty (960–1279) and the Southern Tang (937–965)," *Bulletin of the Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology* 7 (2020): 255–319.

52 Ren Shuang 任爽 and Wu Feng 吳楓, "Wudai fenhe yu Nan Tang de lishi diwei" 五代分合與南唐的歷史地位, *Dongerhua shida xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 東二化師大學報 (哲學社會科學版), no. 5 (1994): 31–37. Also consult Johannes L. Kurz, "Sources for the history of the Southern Tang (937–975)," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 24 (1994): 217–35.

imperial etiquette and ritual adopted during Tang China was considered a way to achieve the goal. As a result, the Southern Tang abounded with experts in imperial etiquette and ritual.

Interestingly, aristocratic families again played no significant role in the process of restoring imperial etiquette and ritual in Jianghuai, as those who took charge in these matters, such as Han Xizai 韓熙載 (902–970) and Jiang Wenwei 江文蔚 (901–952), were without aristocratic background. Han Guangsi 韓光嗣 (d. 926), Han Xizai's father, served as vice military commissioner (*jiedu fushi* 節度副使) of Pinglu 平盧 and was executed by Later Tang Mingzong 後唐明宗 (r. 926–933) for his involvement in mutiny. Jiang Wenwei, originally from Jianzhou 建州, received his *jinsi* degree during the reign of the Later Tang Mingzong. Unlike Han Xizai, who had never served in central government, Jiang was appointed inspector of the postal relay stations (*guanyi xunguan* 館驛巡官) of Henan Prefecture 河南府. His service experience in the capital of the Later Tang afforded him sufficient opportunity to observe ritualistic performances; consequently, he acquired considerable knowledge of etiquette and ceremony.<sup>53</sup>

Although Jiang Wenwei had knowledge of court etiquette and ceremony, authenticity remains an issue. By the time the Later Tang took control of North China, nearly twenty years had elapsed since the Tang dynasty's collapse, thereby making complete restoration of the authentic Tang system of rites and music nearly impossible. Another concern is that the imperial family of the Later Tang originated from the Shatuo 沙陀, a Turkic tribe; non-Han ethnic background is surely a factor that corrupted the original form of the old system. As recorded in *Jiu Wudaishi*, when Later Tang Zhuangzong 後唐莊宗 (r. 923–926) emerged from the frontier wilderness, his entertainment repertoire included nothing other than the barbaric, lewd songs of the Cheng that prevailed in frontier regions (*bianbu Zhengsheng* 邊部鄭聲). As authentic court music was almost non-existent, no musician was successful in replicating the traditional rhythms of musical instruments played in the ancestral hall during the reigns of Emperors Zhuangzong and Mingzong.<sup>54</sup> In other words, the rites and music Southern Tang obtained from the Later Tang were not necessarily practiced in previous dynasties.

Despite the fact that authenticity of the Southern Tang court ritual and ceremony was open to question, working with fabricated material was still preferable to having nothing at all. Following the Southern Tang's collapse,

53 For details, consult Ng, Pak-sheung, "Cultural Interactions and Competitions," 274–75.

54 *Jiu Wudaishi*, 144.1923. Also consult Ng, Pak-sheung, "Cultural Interactions and Competitions," 276.

Jiangnan immediately became the resource from which the Song could complete its own ritual protocols and ceremonies. Another advantage enjoyed by the Southern Tang was its much stronger and more solid ritualistic and literary foundations that allowed Southern Tang *peichen* to fully capitalize upon their advantage. Listed below are notable figures who distinguished themselves in their new careers in the Northern Song:

Name	Place of origin	Aristocratic background
Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916–991)	Guangling 廣陵	Nil
Yang Huizhi 楊徽之 (921–1000)	Pucheng 浦城	Nil
Yang Yi 楊億 (974–1020)	Pucheng	Nil
Diao Kan 刁衍 (945–1013)	Shengzhou 昇州	Nil
Du Hao 杜鎬 (938–1013)	Wuxi 無錫	Nil
Wu Shu 吳淑 (947–1002)	Danyang 丹陽	Nil
Pan Shenxiu 潘慎修 (937–1005)	Putian 莆田	Nil
Qiu Xu 丘旭 (ca. 910–ca. 990)	Xuancheng 宣城	Nil
Yin Chongyi 殷崇義 (912–984)	Qingyang 青陽	Nil
Wang Kezheng 王克正, or	Luling 廬陵	Nil
Wang Kezhen 王克貞 (fl. 952)		
Yue Shi 樂史 (930–1007)	Yihuang 宜黃	Nil
Lü Wenzhong 呂文仲 (d. 1007)	Xinan 新安	Nil
Zhang Ji 張洎 (934–997)	Quanjiao 全椒	Nil
Chen Shu 陳恕 (ca. 945–1004)	Nanchang 南昌	Nil
Wei Yu 魏羽 (944–1001)	Wuyuan 婺源	Nil
Liu Shi 劉式 (949–997)	Lushan 廬山	Nil
He Meng 何蒙 (937–1013)	Hongzhou 洪州	Nil
Chen Pengnian 陳彭年 (961–1017)	Nancheng 南城	Nil

Compared with *peichen* from other subjugated states who started their careers in the Song, those from the Southern Tang constituted the most influential group in both numerical representation as well as in literary and ritual domains. Their erudition, ritual knowledge, and literary ability certainly provided the main reasons. To meet the particular needs of the Northern Song in its cultural endeavors, Southern Tang *peichen* were roughly divided into two groups with different missions: those versed in ancient classics along with ritual change and development were recruited to perform advisory roles in forming new rituals; and those who possessed outstanding literary ability were

appointed to the posts for litterateurs.<sup>55</sup> The *peichen* from the Southern Tang listed in the above two tables comprised only a portion of those recruited by the Northern Song; those not mentioned were not necessarily insignificant, either. For instance, Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962–1025) was not categorized into either group, yet he succeeded in gaining the most prominent position in the Song bureaucracy compared with all the individuals from the Southern Tang.<sup>56</sup>

Like those listed in the previous table, those categorized in above two groups were not of aristocratic background. Evidently, no one from the Southern Tang could be substantially identified as a descendant of aristocracy.<sup>57</sup> This phenomenon gives context to David Johnson's study in which he discusses an observation made by Wang Mingqing 王明清 (1127–ca. 1215) in his *biji* 筆記 titled *Huizhu qianlu* 揮塵前錄. Wang notes that among the six top-class aristocratic families in Tang China, namely the Cui 崔, Lu 盧, Li 李, Zheng 鄭, Wei 韋, and Du 杜, “not one of them has been heard of in the present dynasty.” Johnson relegates the description to “exaggeration,” but at the same time admits it as “a revealing one.”<sup>58</sup> In fact, Johnson states that locating the Zhaojun Lis (*Zhaojun Lishi* 趙郡李氏) in the Northern Song proves no easier.<sup>59</sup> Johnson's study resonates with what had already happened in the Southern Tang, which includes the absence of aristocratic families in the core power structure and their lack of position to facilitate cultural continuity during the Tang-Song Interregnum.

55 For details, consult Ng, Pak-sheung, “Nan Tang *peichen*'s Careers in early Song bureaucracy: With an emphasis on literary and ritual-oriented roles,” *East Asian History* (Forthcoming).

56 On major life events of Wang Qinruo, see Wang Ruilai 王瑞來, “Ningchen ruhe zuoyou huangquan: Yi Bei Song yingxiang Wang Qinruo weili” 佞臣如何左右皇權：以北宋“瘦相”王欽若為例, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 48 (2008): 81–122; Sun Junkai 孫軍凱 and Yang Rui 楊蓁, “Shilun Bei Song qianqi zhengzhi zhong de diyu yinsu – yi nanren shouxiang Wang Qinruo weili” 試論北宋前期政治中的地域因素—以南人首相王欽若為例, *Ningxia shehui kexue* 寧夏社會科學, no. 2 (2019): 152–59.

57 When composing the tomb epitaph (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘) for Wang Qinruo, Zhang Fangping 張方平 (1007–1091) highlighted Wang's choronym (*junwang* 郡望) as Taiyuan in an attempt to portray Wang as a descendant of the top-class aristocratic family in Tang China. See Zhang Fangping 張方平, “Chaosan dafu shou shangshu hubu shilang zhishi shangzhuguo Taiyuanjun kaiguogong shiyi erqian jiubai hu shishifeng wubai hu ci zijin yudai Wanggong muzhiming bingxu” 朝散大夫守尚書戶部侍郎致仕上柱國太原郡開國公食邑二千九百戶食實封五百戶賜紫金魚袋王公墓誌銘並序, in *Quan Song wen*, 38: 825, 266. Surely, this practice aimed merely to boost his status and prestige without plausible substantiation.

58 David G. Johnson, “The last years of a great clan: The Li family of Chao Chün in late T'ang and early Sung,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37.1 (1977), 51.

59 *Ibid.*, 49.

Against this background, the shaping of a cultural climate in Jianguhai during the Tang-Song Interregnum was clearly an initiative undertaken by literati predominantly, if not entirely, of humble origin; aristocrats played no apparent role in this cultural endeavor.

The above phenomenon leaves one critical question: what became of the aristocrats? The answer most likely lies in factors and circumstances that led to the quick and total disappearance of aristocratic families. In my study on the ultimate demise of Tang aristocratic families, the *Jingji* served not only as the location to sustain the physical existence of aristocratic families, but also as an essential hub for this privileged class to build up and consolidate their network. In addition, the *Jingji* fulfilled another critical function by serving as the platform for aristocratic families to affirm their success. Criteria for success in this context refer to three primary items: Civil service examination completion, bureaucratic alignment, and burial of deceased in ancestral graveyards. The collapse of the Tang relegated the *Jingji* to chaos, which consequently deprived aristocratic families of the traditional means to affirm their success. Without the civil service examinations, which had enabled aristocratic families to distinguish themselves, having relinquished the opportunity to engage in burial practices to refresh their sentimental attachment to the *Jingji*, and lacking the bureaucratic careers necessary in preserving their superior position, this privileged class could not survive; it disappeared much quicker than scholars have anticipated.<sup>60</sup>

Referring to previous discussions, some southern kingdoms would ultimately recruit aristocratic families into their administrative establishments. As such, could the aristocratic families of Jianguhai have represented a unique scenario? Primary sources related to the kingdoms in question tend to describe the initial stage of forming their ruling mechanisms; whether or not aristocratic families could continue and consolidate their influence therefore remains an issue. A better comprehension of this issue surely calls for additional case studies on the power structure of the southern kingdoms.

#### 4 Conclusion

Echoing claims listed in the introduction, below are some concluding remarks.

A literary function was perpetuated by the close linkage traditionally existing between writing and authority, meaning that imperial rule needed to be

60 Ng Pak-sheung 伍伯常, "History of Aristocratic Families in Tang China: Part 2, The Ultimate Demise," *Journal of Asian History* 55.2 (2021): 217–50.



substantiated by the writing of government decrees. Shaping the societal mindset as well as norms and values desired by the emperor also required literary undertaking. Due to the needs in all times, the *wenci* had been important in the Tang as well as all dynasties in imperial China. Also, the cause-and-effect relationship that existed between writing and authority contributed to the creation and continuity of the *qingliu wenhua*. This new conceptual framework sheds light on a literary tradition that prevailed among the elite group in Tang China; the tradition had its own inner life that was demonstrated not only in its fulfillment of a literary function, but also in its vitality to bridge constraints during the Five Dynasties' times of turbulence and persecution. The end of the *qingliu wenhua* in mid-Song serves as an entry point that allows historians to study how the elite in the Tang and the Song shaped their cultural identity and political norm differently. As the Southern Tang was the only regime able to preserve long-term stability and cultural prosperity, it provided the needed environment for the *cichen* to continue their literary function. In this sense, the Southern Tang might be the regime from which evidence can be found to prove the continuity of the *qingliu wenhua*.

During the Five Dynasties, northern China experienced a long period of war and chaos that caused a decline in almost all aspects of its cultural heritage. Cultural decline was further intensified as most of the rulers were military leaders whose regimes tended to hold culture in disdain. Against this background, the Southern Tang's cultural attainments would be valuable to the Northern Song. From the Southern Tang, the Northern Song could appropriate whatever elements it needed in order to culturally embellish the dynasty. If the Tang aristocratic families could play a significant role in this endeavor, their direct involvement would certainly be a reliable guarantee for their own continued existence and prosperity. Much to the disappointment of aristocratic families, Yang Wu showed no interest in enlisting them into its administrative mechanism. Although the Southern Tang was named after the Tang and its founder even claimed that he was descendant of the Tang imperial family, ironically, aristocratic families, the backbone of the Tang, played no evident role in the new regime's cultural domain.

Due to the absence of aristocratic families in Jianghuai, all career opportunities were taken by non-aristocrats. As indicated in the political hierarchy and in the civil service examination system, those who occupied a position in the core power structure were not affiliated with the aristocracy while all successful examination candidates were of humble origin. After the downfall of the Southern Tang, a number of officials with erudition, ritual knowledge, and literary ability were appointed to continue their careers in the Northern Song. Besides their numeric representation, their advantage was reflected in

the literary and ritual domains. In this process of cultural continuity, the Tang aristocrats did not seem to be involved nor play any role. Their disappearance in this significant aspect conveys a clear message that they had already stepped down from the historical arena during the reign of the Southern Tang. Definitely, what happened in the Jianghuai region represents only a single case; a complete picture concerning the destiny of aristocratic families necessitates a comprehensive study of all kingdoms founded during the era of the Five Dynasties and the Ten Kingdoms.

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