

The White Horse Massacre and Changing Literati Culture in Late-Tang and Five Dynasties China

In 907, during the fourth year of the Tianyou 天祐 reign period, after nearly three centuries of rule the Tang dynasty came to a final end when Zhu Quanzhong 朱全忠 (852–912) founded his Da Liang 大梁 (Latter Liang; 907–923) dynasty.¹ It marked the beginning of a half-century of political fragmentation, known historically as the Five Dynasties period (Wudai 五代, 907–960).² Although the Tang ended officially that year, one can argue that the moment had arrived three years earlier, first with the murder of emperor Zhaozong 昭宗 (r. 888–904), then a purge of court officials that targeted mostly the great clans. The collapse of the Tang was the result of a broader process that took a long time in the making and that had begun with the eighth-century An Lushan 安祿山 Rebellion (755–763). Nonetheless, the sequence of events that transpired during the last few years was so dramatic that it was symbolic of the changing social and political realities of the times. The awareness of the imminent dynastic collapse also propelled a corresponding change of values, particularly the ways in which literati viewed themselves.

This article seeks to understand the changes in literati culture during the interregnum between the late-Tang and Five Dynasties by

AN EARLIER version of this paper was presented at the Southeastern Conference Meeting of the Association for Asia Studies, Hilton Head, South Carolina, January, 2008. I would like to express my gratitude to John Kieschnick and Howard L. Goodman for assistance in editing and improving the style, resulting in this version.

¹ Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976; hereafter cited as *ZZTJ*) 266, pp. 8672–74.

² For a recent outline of the history of the Five Dynasties period, see Naomi Standen, “The Five Dynasties,” in Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith, eds., *The Cambridge History of China; Volume 5 Part One: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2009), pp. 38–132. For some discussions of the cultural situation of the period, see He Bingsong 何炳松, “Wudai shi zhi wenhua” 五代時之文化, in Liu Yinsheng 劉寅生 and Fang Xinliang 房鑫亮, eds., *He Bingsong wenji* 何炳松文集 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1997), vol. 2, pp. 334–67; Honda Wataru 本田濟, “Godai no fūki to sono bunshō” 五代の風氣とその文章, in *Tōyō shisō kenkyū* 東洋思想研究 (Tokyo: Shobunsha, 1987), pp. 347–94.

examining a violent event of the early summer of 905; it is known in traditional historiography as the White Horse Massacre (*Baima zhi huo* 白馬之禍). A political and cultural analysis of the massacre allows us to identify some of the forces that not only contributed to the massacre itself, but also subsequently shaped literati discourse throughout the period under examination – a period that culminated in the final dissolution of the medieval aristocracy.³

EMPEROR ZHAOZONG AND THE LAST YEARS OF THE TANG

To put these changes in proper context, it is necessary to highlight the political situation during the last few years of the Tang, when the political order deteriorated rapidly. The reigning emperor, Zhaozong, had come to the throne near the end of the ninth century, when many, due to the empire-wide devastation of the Huangchao 黃巢 Rebellion (874–884), had lost hope of a possible Tang revival.⁴ The southeast, the last stronghold of the Tang, had turned into a battle ground. Much of the magnificent capital city of Chang'an had been burned down, its central place in Chinese politics never to be restored.⁵ During the last few years of the emperor's reign, the court had become an arena of power struggles among the palace eunuchs, court officials, and local warlords; thus Zhaozong's death in the autumn of 904 seemed to mark the end.

As a general of the Huangchao rebel force earlier, Zhu Quanzong had surrendered to the Tang and successfully assisted the court to suppress the rebellion. Consequently, he rose to the position of prince of Liang with a power base in Bianzhou 汴州, near Luoyang. He moved on to dominate the capital region (*guanzhong* 關中),⁶ and established a cordial relationship with the recalcitrant Weibo 魏博 province.⁷

³ See David Johnson, "The Last Years of a Great Clan: The Li Family of Chao Chün in Late T'ang and Early Sung," *HJAS* 37.1 (1977), pp. 377–403; Jo-Shui Chen, "Culture as Identity during the T'ang-Sung Transition: The Ch'ing-ho Ts'uis and Po-ling Ts'uis," *AM* 3d ser. 9.1–2 (1996), pp. 103–38.

⁴ See Robert M. Somers, "The End of the T'ang," in Denis Twitchett, ed., *Cambridge History of China, Vol. 3, Sui and T'ang China, 589–906, Part I* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1979), pp. 727–54.

⁵ See Edward Schafer, "The Last Years of Ch'ang-an," *OE* 10 (1963), pp. 157–70.

⁶ For a contemporary complaint about the encroachment of Zhu's military force on the capital area, see Sun Qiao 孫樵 (*jinshi* 855), "Yu Bian guancha panguan shu" 寓汴觀察判官書, in Dong Gao 董誥 et al., eds., *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983; hereafter *QTW*) 794, p. 11b. See also Gungwu Wang, *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1963), p. 79.

⁷ See Mao Hanguang 毛漢光, "Tangmo Wudai zhengzhi shehui zhi yanjiu, Weibo erbai nian shi lun" 唐末五代政治社會之研究魏博二百年史論, *ZYY* 50.2 (1979), pp. 321–28.

During those last years of power struggles, the emperor came under the sway of various parties and was driven away from Chang'an a number of times because of factional conflicts. He was dethroned by eunuch leaders and put under "house arrest" in the Eastern Palace at the end of 900. Although he was quickly restored in early 901, other military warlords were now fighting to bring him under their control. By the end of the year, Zhaozong was forced to move to Fengxiang 鳳翔, governed by the warlord Li Maozhen 李茂貞.⁸ Zhu's soldiers then put the city under siege for close to a year, leading to food shortages and possibly even cannibalism.⁹

When Zhu finally "captured" the emperor, he quickly ordered all the eunuchs killed in early 903,¹⁰ and of course this ended a factor in the power struggles at court. But this did not improve the overall situation for the dynasty. In February of 904 (occurring in the fourth year of the Tianfu 天復 reign), Zhaozong was forced to move to Luoyang, closer to Zhu's power base at Bianzhou. The emperor was well aware of his fate. When the procession arrived at Huazhou 華州, citizens crowded along the road to welcome him, shouting *Wansui* 萬歲! ("Ten thousand years!"). However, the emperor is said to have wept and told them not to shout "Wansui" anymore, for he was no longer their ruler!¹¹

Despite the fact that Zhu had brought the emperor under his control, north China was far from secure. Besides a few officials who remained loyal to the Tang, many local military leaders developed dynastic ambitions. Among them, Li Keyong 李克用 (856–908) in Taiyuan 太原 was a major rival, and Zhu also had to fend off both criticism and attacks from other warlords. The list of rival military governors is long, including Li Maozhen in Fengxiang, Yang Chongben 楊崇本 in Binzhou 邠州, Liu Rengong 劉仁恭 in Youzhou 幽州, Wang Jian 王建 in Shu 蜀, Yang Xingmi 楊行密 in Jiangxi 江西, and Zhao Kuangning 趙匡凝 in Xiangzhou 襄州. Therefore, soon after taking control of Zhaozong, Zhu quickly began to plan for the pacification of the north and to found a new dynasty as well.

As Zhu become increasingly concerned both that his rivals might take control of Zhaozong and that the emperor was reluctant to abdicate the throne, he ordered Jiang Xuanhui 蔣玄暉 (d. 905) to murder

⁸ Liu Xu 劉昫 et al., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975; hereafter cited as *JTS*) 20A, pp. 770–73.

⁹ As a result of heavy snow and a food shortage in the city, many died from cold and starvation. Some sold their flesh at prices lower than that of dog meat! See *ZZTJ* 263, p. 8586.

¹⁰ *ZZTJ* 263, p. 8594.

¹¹ *ZZTJ* 264, p. 8627.

the emperor. Zhaozong was killed on September 22, 904.¹² Li Zhu 李柷, Zhaozong's thirteen-year-old ninth son, was put on the throne; he would become posthumously titled Aidi 哀帝 (r. 904–907). Zhaozong's reign had been relatively long, a total of seventeen years. The emperor is described as having been strong-minded, with the serious intention to restore Tang authority.¹³ For example, the retesting of *jinshi* 進士 candidates in Qianning 2d year (895) can be seen as an attempt to reform the examination system, in particular, to reverse the trend ever since emperor Xuaanzong 宣宗 (r. 846–860) of privileging candidates who descended from the great clans.¹⁴

However, Zhaozong had come to the throne at a time when many provinces had turned recalcitrant, if not outright rebellious. Quite a few of the ambitious military men, mentioned above, were located dangerously close to the capital. Hence, despite his intentions, Zhaozong could not achieve much on his own. A remark in *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 testifies lucidly to his predicament:

Since ancient times, the fall of a dynasty was not necessarily due to ruthless or incapable rulers. There are reasons that gave rise to calamities. When the [fortune of the state] declined, even for those who were wise and brave, there was little that they could do about it. Emperor Zhaozong was such a ruler.”¹⁵

In fact, Zhu Quanzhong's decision to murder Zhaozong has been said to have had something to do with the fact of the emperor's assertive personality.¹⁶

Besides being merely sympathetic to Zhaozong, such statements suggest that he was the last real emperor of the Tang. Aidi, just a boy, was a puppet put on the throne to prepare for Zhu's final usurpation. This is reflected in the continual application of the reign name Tianyou during the last three years of the Tang.¹⁷ Moreover, some writers in

¹² *ZZTJ* 265, pp. 8635–36; see Jiang's biog. in Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁, *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975; hereafter, *XTS*) 223B, p. 6361.

¹³ See Jiang Weigong 姜維公, “Tang Zhaozong de zhiguo yu Tang de miewang” 唐昭宗的治國與唐的滅亡, *Changchun shiyuan xuebao* 長春師院學報 1994.4, pp. 20–23.

¹⁴ See Liu Haifeng 劉海峰 and Li Bing 李兵, *Zhongguo keju shi* 中國科舉史 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubun zhongxin, 2004), pp. 134–36. See also the sources cited in Meng Erdong 孟二冬, *Dengke ji kao buzheng* 登科記考補正 (Beijing: Yanshan chubanshe, 2003; hereafter, *DKJKBZ*) 24, pp. 1019–22. The spelling “Xuaanzong” is used to differentiate from emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756).

¹⁵ *XTS* 10, p. 305.

¹⁶ *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8635. See also the Annals of Zhaozong in *JTS* 20A, p. 782.

¹⁷ Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) believed that Aidi kept Zhaozong's reign name because he was afraid of Zhu Quanzong. See *Rongzhai xubi* 容齋續筆, in *Rongzhai suibi* 容齋隨筆 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1998) 10, p. 341. Although this does not answer the question of

the Five Dynasties considered Zhaozong as the last Tang emperor. For example, when officials deliberated on the temple name for Li Bian 李昇, founder of Southern Tang, many remarked that Bian was succeeding Zhaozong, rather than Aidi, in reviving the Tang imperial order.¹⁸ Therefore, one can say that the Tang dynasty really ended with the Tianyou reign. Although the White Horse Massacre took place after Zhaozong's death, the decision to murder Zhaozong and his court officials was part of the same plan to prepare for dynastic transition.

THE WHITE HORSE MASSACRE – THE EVENT

The White Horse Massacre took place during the summer of 905. According to *Zizhi tongjian*, it all began with omens in the sky:

On the *yichou* day 乙丑, a comet 彗星 appeared in the sky for a long while. At that time, Liu Can 柳璨 (d. 905) dominated court affairs with the backing of Zhu Quanzhong. On this astronomical anomaly, the astrologers commented that, “Both the emperor and the officials will [face] calamity. It is necessary to resolve this omen with killings.” [Liu] Can therefore referred to those whom he did not get along with, saying to Quanzhong, “They gather together to criticize the court, showing their contempt. We should use them to avert a calamity.” Li Zhen 李振 (d. ca. 937) also told Quanzhong that, “The reason why the court failed to govern properly is because of the disorder brought on by these officials 衣冠. Moreover, since you are planning for great achievement (i.e. to establish a new dynasty), why not get rid of them as they are difficult to control.” Quanzhong agreed. On the *guiyou* 癸酉 day, [the court demoted] Dugu Sun 獨孤損 as prefect of Dizhou 棣州, Pei Shu 裴樞 as prefect of Dengzhou 登州, and Cui Yuan 崔遠 as prefect of Laizhou 萊州. On the *yihai* 乙亥 day, the director of the Ministry of Personnel Lu Yi 陸扈 was banished to the post of revenue manager of Puzhou 濮州, the director of the Ministry of Public Works Wang Pu 王溥 as revenue manager of Zizhou 淄州. On the *gengchen* 庚辰 day, the grand protector of the heir-apparent Zhao Chong 趙崇 was banished to Caozhou 曹州 as revenue manager, and the vice-director of the Ministry of the Military Wang Zan 王

why Zhu decided not to change the reign name, it is evidence that Zhu was the one who decided to keep it.

¹⁸ See the biography of Han Xizai 韓熙載 (902–970) in *Shiguo chunqiu* 十國春秋 (Wu Rencheng 吳任臣), in Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 et al., eds., *Wudai shishu huibian* 五代史書彙編 (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004; hereafter *SGCQ*), vol. 7, j. 28, p. 3786.

贊 to Weizhou 濰州 as revenue manager. The rest [of those who were demoted] were from prominent families or those who began their career with examination degrees. They rose to occupy leading posts in the Three Boards, taking pride in their reputations and positions. [Yet], those among them who achieved reknown were all identified as frivolous. They were banished within days so that officials with degree holdings disappeared [from the court]. On the *xinsi* 辛巳 day, Pei Shu was further banished to the post of revenue manager of Longzhou 瀧州, Dugu Sun to Qiongzhou 瓊州 as revenue manager, Cui Yuan to Baizhou 白州 as revenue manager ... On the *wuzi* 戊子 day of the sixth month, it was decreed that Pei Shu, Dugu Sun, Cui Yuan, Lu Yi, Wang Pu, Zhao Chong, and Wang Zan should commit suicide. At this time, Zhu Quanzhong ordered that Pei Shu and others who were banished, over thirty in total, stay in the White Horse postal station. He had them all killed in one evening, and threw their bodies into the Yellow River. Previously, Li Zhen sat for the *jinshi* examination a number of times, but failed [repeatedly] to obtain the degree. Hence, he cultivated grudges against those who held degrees. He said to Quanzhong that, “they often refer to themselves as the ‘pure stream.’ We should throw them into the Yellow River so that they would become the ‘muddy stream’!” Quanzhong laughed and accepted his recommendation.¹⁹

Obviously, the massacre takes its name from the location – White Horse postal station (Baima yi 白馬驛). It was located north of Bianzhou, on the north shore of the Yellow River, a strategically important river-crossing in medieval China.²⁰

The massacre is said to have been a response to an astronomical anomaly (*xingbian* 星變), which justified the extreme measure of murdering high court officials. Although there were numerous precedents in previous dynasties for taking such extreme measures as executing court officials,²¹ the scale of the killing in this particular case marks it off from the rest. Of the variety of celestial anomalies, erratic comets

¹⁹ *ZZTJ* 265, pp. 8642–43. Other relevant sources on this event include Liu Can’s biogs. *JTS* 179, p. 4670, and *XTS* 223B, p. 6360; and Li Zhen’s biog. in Xu Juzheng 薛居正 et al., *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976; hereafter *JWDS*) 18, p. 253.

²⁰ See Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, *Tangdai jiaotong tu kao* 唐代交通圖考 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 2003), vol. 6, p. 1999. See also volume 5, diagram 19: “Tangdai Hedong Taiheng qu jiaotong tu (nanfu)” 唐代河東太行區交通圖 (南幅) and the discussion in chap. 45, “Taiheng donglu nanbei zoulang yidao” 太行東麓南北走廊驛道, pp. 1527–30.

²¹ For some discussions of pre-Tang court practice of reacting to astronomic anomalies, see Zhao Zhen 趙貞, “Tangdai xingbian de zhanbu yiyi dui zaichen zhengzhi shengya de ying-

were considered the most disturbing. Between May and June of 905, two comets had been observed; both came very close to the Taiwei yuan 太微垣, Wenchang 文昌, and Tianshi yuan 天市垣 Enclosures, namely, celestial configurations believed to be directly correlated to the imperial system.²²

Only twenty-one days had lapsed between these observations. With two comets appearing so closely to important Enclosures, it is not surprising that they provoked anxiety at court. A series of measures were adopted to resolve the potential calamity, including a general amnesty and acts of grace, reduction of officials' stipends, avoidance of receiving audience of officials in the main palace, holding of special religious rituals by leading members of the Buddhist and Daoist clergies, and the changing of names of palaces and gates.²³ Finally, the most extreme of all of them – the killing of high court officials – was adopted.²⁴

Zhu Quanzhong, Liu Can, and Li Zhen were the key players who planned and carried out the massacre. Zhu accepted the recommendations by Liu and Li to take the opportunity to eliminate resistance. Most of the victims mentioned in the passage were demoted to the position of revenue manager (*sihu* 司戶; see table 1).²⁵ This began in June of 905.²⁶ Over thirty victims were brought to the White Horse postal station. The climax came on July 5, when they were all murdered. The day ended with their bodies being thrown into the Yellow River.

However, this was not the end of the massacre. The above passage clearly mentions that a number of officials were demoted after this main event. It is likely that many of them were killed, though we cannot be certain if they were also murdered at the White Horse postal station.²⁷

xiang” 唐代星變的占卜意義對宰臣政治生涯的影響, *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊 2004.2, pp. 30–36; Huang Yinong 黃一農, “Zhongguo xingzhan xue shang zuixiong de tianxiang: ‘Yinghuo shouxin’” 中國星占學上最凶的天象, 熒惑守心, in his *Shehui tianwen xue shi shi jiang* 社會天文學史十講 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue, 2004), pp. 23–48.

²² There are slight discrepancies in the records of these observations. See “Tianwen zhi” 天文志, in *XTS* 32, pp. 841–42; *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8642; Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995; hereafter cited as *XWDS*) 35, p. 375; *JTS* 179, p. 4670; and *XTS* 223B, p. 6360. For a brief discussion of the astrological significance of these enclosures and asterism in Chinese political culture, see Peng Yoke Ho, *Li, Qi and Shu: An Introduction to Science and Civilization in China* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1985), p. 146.

²³ See the “Annals of Aidi” in *JTS* 20B, pp. 792–93.

²⁴ See *JTS* 179, p. 4670; *XTS* 223B, p. 6360.

²⁵ Unless stated otherwise, official titles are rendered in English following Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1985).

²⁶ *JTS* 20B, pp. 794–98.

²⁷ So far, we can only verify that Li Yangu was able to escape the massacre; see biog. *JWDS* 60, p. 807.

Table 1. Victims of the White Horse Massacre

dir. = director • CM= Chief Minister • M = Ministry of • n/d = not determinable

NAME	DEGREE	FAMILY BACKGROUND	POSITIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES
Cui Yuan 崔遠	<i>jinshi</i> 889	member Boling 博陵 Cuis	CM	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 24:1002
Dugu Sun 獨孤損	n/d	descendant Dugu Ji 獨孤及 ^A	CM; examiner in 896	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 24:1030
Lu Yi 陸晨	<i>jinshi</i> 886	member Wujun 吳郡 Lus. The famous chief minister Lu Zhi 陸贄 (754-805) was his great-uncle.	CM	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 23:993, top rank (<i>zhuangyuan</i>); <i>XTS</i> 73A:2979; biog. <i>XTS</i> 183:5383
Pei Shu 裴樞	<i>jinshi</i> 871	member <i>zhongjuan</i> 中眷 branch of Shandong Peis	CM	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 23:961; <i>XTS</i> 71A:2217
Wang Pu 王溥	<i>jinshi</i>	n/d	CM; dir. of M Public Works (<i>gongbu shangshu</i> 工部尚書; 3a), <i>taichang qing</i>	biog. <i>XTS</i> 182:5377 ^B
Wang Zan 王贊	n/d	n/d	vice-dir. M War (<i>bingbu shilang</i> 兵部侍郎)	
Zhao Chong 趙崇	<i>jinshi</i> 872	member Xin'an 新安 Zhaos	retired acting minister of education (<i>jianjiao situ</i> 檢校司徒); Probationary Great Guardian (<i>shou taibao</i> 守太保); examiner in 889	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 23:965; <i>XTS</i> 73B:2984; <i>DKJKBZ</i> 24:1003

Cui Cheng 崔澄	n/d ^C	Cui Yuan's uncle	chancellor, Directorate of Education (<i>guozhi jijiu</i> 國子祭酒; 3b)	
Cui Renlu 崔仁魯	n/d	Cui Yuan's cousin	dir. Palace Library (<i>bishu jian</i> 秘書監; 3b)	<i>XTS</i> 72B:2795
Cui Renlue 崔仁略	n/d	clansman of Cui Yuan	magistrate of Changshui prefecture (Changshui <i>ling</i> 長水令; 6a-7b)	
Cui Xianxiu 崔咸休	n/d	n/d	rectifier of Omissions to the Left (<i>zuo buque</i> 左補闕; 7b1)	

THE WHITE HORSE MASSACRE

NAME	DEGREE	FAMILY BACKGROUND	POSITIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES
Dugu Tao 獨孤韜	n/d	n/d	magistrate of Nishui prefecture (Nishui <i>ling</i> 泥水令; 6a–7b)	
Dugu Xian 獨孤憲	n/d	clansman of Dugu Xun	Retired; formerly Judge in Salt Monopoly Bureau (<i>yantie tuiguan</i> 鹽鐵推官; 8b)	
Feng Hui 封渭	<i>jinshi</i> 895	member Bohai 渤海 Fengs?	drafter in the Secretariat (<i>zhongshu sheren</i> 中書舍人; 5a)	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 24:1023; <i>XTS</i> 71B:2345
Jing Zhao 敬沼	n/d	n/d	vice-minister Awesome Guard (<i>weiwei shaoqing</i> 衛尉少卿; 4 or 5)	
Li Guangxu 李光序	Failed after 895 re-test ^D	n/d	district magistrate of Luoyang (Luoyang <i>xianling</i> 洛陽縣令; 7a–5a)	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 24:1025
Li Renjian 李仁儉	n/d	n/d	dir. M Revenue (<i>hubu langzhong</i> 戶部郎中; 5b)	
Li Xiang 李象	n/d ^E	n/d	dir. M War (<i>bingbu langzhong</i> 兵部郎中; 5b)	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 25:1090
Li Xun 李煦	n/d	member Dongzu 東祖 branch of Zhaojun 趙郡 Lis?	dir. M Punishment (<i>xingbu langzhong</i> 刑部郎中; 5b)	<i>XTS</i> 72a:2580–2581
Liu Xun 柳遜	n/d	n/d	Advisor to the Heir-Apparent (<i>taizi bingke</i> 太子賓客; 3a), Vice Minister M Works (<i>gongbu shilang</i> 工部侍郎; 4a)	
Lu Jian 盧薦	n/d	n/d	vice-dir. M Punishment (<i>xingbu yuanwai</i> 刑部員外; 6b1)	
Lu Renjiong 盧仁炯	<i>jinshi</i> 894	n/d	imperial diarist (<i>qiju sheren</i> 起居舍人; 6b1)	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 24:1016
Lu Xie 盧協	n/d	n/d	vice-dir. M War (<i>bingbu yuanwai</i> 兵部員外; 6b1)	
Lu Xun 陸珣	n/d	clansman of Lu Yi		
Lu Yan 盧晏	n/d	n/d	District Defender of Shouan prefecture (Shouan <i>wei</i> 壽安尉;), Auxiliary academician of Institute for the Advancement of Literature (<i>zhi Hongwen guan</i> 直弘文館)	

KWOK-YIU WONG

NAME	DEGREE	FAMILY BACKGROUND	POSITIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES
Pei Ge 裴格	<i>jinshi</i> 900	Pei Shu's elder brother	district defender of Chang'an (Chang'an <i>wei</i> 長安尉), Auxiliary academician Bureau of Historiography (<i>zhi Shiguan</i> 直史館)	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 24:1037, top rank (<i>zhuangyuan</i>)
Pei Lian 裴練	n/d	clansman of Pei Shu	Magistrate Mi district (Mixian <i>ling</i> 密縣令)	
Pei Xu 裴紆	n/d	n/d	vice-minister Court for the Imperial Regalia (<i>weiwei shaoqing</i> 衛尉少卿; 4 or 5)	
Pei Xu 裴銑	n/d	n/d	vice-dir. Palace Library (<i>mishu shaojian</i> 秘書少監; 4b)	
Pei Zhen 裴鍼	n/d	n/d	vice-minister Court of Imperial Treasury (<i>taifu shaoqing</i> 太府少卿; below 3a)	
Pei Zhi 裴贇	<i>jinshi</i> 872	member Shandong Peis	retired CM; examiner in 890, 891, 898	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 23:965; <i>XTS</i> 71a:2220; <i>DKJKBZ</i> 23:965, 24:1005, 1035
Wei Qian- mei 韋乾美	n/d	n/d	<i>bingbu langzhong</i> 兵部郎中	
Wei Zhen 韋甄	<i>jinshi</i>	n/d	vice-dir. Bureau of Merit Titles (<i>sixun yuanwai</i> 司勳員外; 6b1)	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 27:1248, year uncertain
Xue Gao 薛濤	n/d	n/d	vice-dir. Bureau of Honors (<i>sifeng yuanwai</i> 司封員外; 6b1)	
Zheng Nian 鄭輦	n/d	n/d	Rectifier of Omissions to the Right (<i>you buque</i> 右補闕; 7b1)	

^A Quite a few Tang empresses were from the Dugu clan. Dugu Ji was a mid-8th-c proponent of *guwen*; David McMullen, "Historical and Literary Theory in Mid-eighth Century," in Arthur Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the Tang* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1973), pp 307–42.

^B The biog. (see "Sources" column) mentions his obtaining degree, but gives no other details; *DKJKBZ* 26:1118 does not mention the degree, but has a Wang Fu who obtained top rank in the 948 *jinshi*; this was a different person

^C *Dengke jikao* mentions a *jinshi* graduate Cui Cheng who died during Tianbao 天寶 (742–756): obviously not the same person.

^D Li allowed to take the examination in the future, but there is no record of his doing so.

^E A Li Xiang passed the 930 *jinshi* exam, but was failed after a re-test; clearly not the same Li Xiang.

For example, Zhang Wenwei's 張文蔚 (d. ca. 908) biography notes that more than ten were killed after the event on the 1st of the 6th month, before Zhang managed to stop the "killing spree" of Liu Can.²⁸ If we believe Ouyang Xiu's account, then many more were charged with the crime of complicity. As a result, a few hundred people were killed.²⁹

As most sources mention a list compiled by Liu Can of over thirty names to be targeted, this agrees closely with the number of victims given in the passage. It is also clear that many of the victims were closely related. For example, Cui Cheng and Cui Renlu were uncles of Cui Yuan.³⁰ Thus, taking into consideration the charge of complicity, there is little doubt that the final number of victims well exceeded thirty. In this sense, the number of a "few hundreds" given by Ouyang Xiu, though it seems at first somewhat exaggerated, is not impossible.

THE POLITICS OF THE MASSACRE

The massacre was largely a political event, and the motivations behind it were complex. Although most of the victims were court officials, we cannot describe them simply as martyrs – loyal subjects who chose to die for the cause of the Tang imperial house – because quite a few of them held ambivalent positions in their dealings with Zhu Quanzhong. Different considerations had guided the ways in which they "participated" in this last episode of Tang history. The most notable example is the case of Pei Shu. Like Liu Can, he was a collaborator who had cultivated cordial ties with Zhu early on in his career. According to his biography, he treated Zhu like an "elder brother 兄."³¹ Moreover, it was with Zhu's support that he was able to secure the position of chief minister.³²

Perhaps Ouyang Xiu was trying to promote the virtue of loyalty 忠,³³ namely, the duty that a subject must righteously die with the fallen dynasty, when he spoke on behalf of Pei and other victims of the massacre. Given the fact that Pei and the others had refused to appoint Zhang Tingfan 張廷範 (d. 905) as chamberlain for ceremonials (*taichang qing* 太常卿), Ouyang Xiu contended that they would certainly not be-

²⁸ See *JWDS* 18, p. 242.

²⁹ *XWDS* 35, p. 375.

³⁰ See Jiang Weigong and Gao Wenhui 高文輝, "Baima zhihuo' kaoxi" 白馬之禍考析, *Changchun shifan xueyuan xuebao* 長春師範學院學報 18.3 (1999), p. 32.

³¹ *JTS* 113, p. 3357; *XTS* 140, p. 4648.

³² *JTS* 113, pp. 3357–58.

³³ See Naomi Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossings in Liao China* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 2007), pp. 41–63, for discussion of a "change of stance" on the virtue of loyalty in the Northern Song.

tray the Tang.³⁴ But this is likely wishful thinking guided largely by Ouyang's moral and political conviction and predilection. Fan Zuyu 范祖禹 (1041–1098) disagreed with Ouyang; he remarked that Pei had been working with Zhu all the while. Pei's demise, according to Fan, had more to do with his foolish adherence to an old worldview that strictly separated the “old clans” from the newcomers, the “pure” from the “muddy.”³⁵

If other victims had adopted a similar attitude in their dealings with Zhu, which was quite likely, then the decision to unleash the “killing spree” cannot be explained satisfactorily by the simple antagonistic political stance between two opposite cliques.³⁶ Sources reveal that Zhu was largely responsible for the massacre. This was likely a result of a heightened anxiety in fulfilling his dynastic ambition. However, when the purge of officials devastated court morale, Zhu was greatly alarmed by it. In this respect, Liu Can and his cohorts were killed for a task badly executed.

The forced relocation of Zhaozong to Luoyang in 904 helped Zhu to gain direct access and control of both the emperor and the court from his power base at Bianzhou. As Zhu was occupied with various campaigns against rivals, Jiang Xuanhui and Zhang Tingfan served as his agents in Luoyang. However, their lowly origins prevented them from taking up any key court positions, so that they could not become directly involved in policy-making. The reluctance to admit Zhang Tingfan into the core of the Tang court best discloses the political culture of the times. Hence, it was necessary for Zhu to have collaborators from the great clans like Liu Can and Cui Yin 崔胤 (851–901), a predecessor of Liu, whose executive roles in the central government helped to maintain his control of the court and to protect his interests.³⁷

Zhu also had many of his men in different positions at court, as well as men who, by frequently visiting Luoyang from Bianzhou, could communicate his opinions on various matters. Li Zhen was a key delegate of Zhu serving in such a capacity. With much authority bestowed

³⁴ *XWDS* 35, p. 376.

³⁵ See *Tang jian* 唐鑑 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1981) 12, pp. 9a–10a.

³⁶ Hong Mai, for example, believed that Pei Zhi and other victims of the massacre were partly responsible for their demise; see entry “Lu Zhiyou” 盧知猷 in *Rongzhai xubi* 14, p. 382. Fang Jianming 方堅銘 holds that Zhu Quanzhong may not have had any direct role in initiating the massacre. Instead, it was largely the result of antagonism among different groups within the literati community. See his “Baima yi shijian yu xiangguan shige zuopin” 白馬驛事件與相關詩歌作品, *Zhejiang gongye daxue xuebao* 浙江工業大學學報 5.1 (2006), p. 44.

³⁷ It is said that Cui's alliance with Zhu helped to bolster Zhu's dynastic ambitions; see Cui's biog. *XTS* 223B, p. 6358.

to him, Li was able to exercise great power at Luoyang. It is said that he would usually banish court officials during his stays there.³⁸ In the events surrounding the murder of Zhaozong, Zhu sent Li to Luoyang to plan with Jiang Xuanhui, Zhu Yougong 朱友恭 (d. 904), and Ji Shucong 氏叔琮 (d. 904), two more of Zhu's men.³⁹ This strongly suggests that Li was closely involved in the massacre, beyond making the recommendation of throwing the corpses into the Yellow River.

Between the demotions of court officials and the massacre, a total of seventeen days had lapsed before the final killing took place. There was enough time for Zhu and his subordinates to plan for the massacre. Li likely traveled back and forth between Luoyang and Bianzhou during this period to communicate the details of the plan and offer his advice to Zhu. Furthermore, as Zhu was in Luoyang at least once during this period, it is quite possible that he was also involved more directly in planning the massacre.⁴⁰

From the moment when Zhu Quanzhong brought Zhaozong under his control at the beginning of 903, a number of measures were swiftly carried out, such as the killing of over seven hundred eunuchs, the relocation of Zhaozong to Luoyang, the murder of Zhaozong in autumn, and the killing of Zhaozong's brothers early in 905.⁴¹ Seen in such a context, the massacre was a logical step for Zhu to remove all potential resistance at court. In fact, Zhu was quite prepared to remove any potential threats to his plan even those from his own camp. Within a short time after the massacre, Liu Can, Jiang Xuanhui, and Zhang Tingfan were put to death.⁴²

Although Zhu's dynastic ambitions were clear to many people, he was neither willing nor ready to alienate himself from the rest of the scholar-official class. An event that occurred in early 904 helps to illustrate this. This is the case of the murder of Zhang Rui 張濬 and his family. Recently retired from the post of chief minister, Zhang remained very vocal about court policy. Wang Shifan, a rival of Zhu, attempted to recruit Zhang as an advisor. Alarmed, Zhu decided to eliminate Zhang, but was unwilling to kill him openly. Instead, he ordered his general

³⁸ *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8643.

³⁹ *XWDS* 43, p. 470. Zhu Yougong and Ji Shucong were military men serving Zhu Quanzhong and later sent to Luoyang. Ouyang Xiu also placed their biogs. in the section "Jianchen" 姦臣 (Traacherous Subjects); *XTS* 223B, pp. 6362–63.

⁴⁰ See *JTS* 20B, p. 795.

⁴¹ *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8640.

⁴² For some examples showing this violent side of Zhu's character, see Sun Guangxian 孫光憲, *Beimeng suoyan* 北夢瑣言 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002; hereafter *BMSY*) 4, p. 93; *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8644.

Zhang Quanyi, together with fifty soldiers, to dress up as thugs so that the killing would appear merely as a case of robbery and murder.⁴³ This demonstrates unequivocally that Zhu was concerned about public opinion, and helps to explain why he was upset about the outcome of the White Horse Massacre.

As a result of the massacre, many officials simply stopped coming to court.⁴⁴ Quite a few fled the capital to find refuge.⁴⁵ For example, Li Qi 李琪 (d. ca. 932), a censor-in-chief (*yushi* 御史) at the time, together with Yang Fen 楊玠 took refuge in the Jing-Chu 荆楚 area of the south in order to escape the post-massacre havoc.⁴⁶ Similarly, Li Yu 李愚 (d. ca. 935) found shelter in the Hesuo 河朔 area in the north because of the killing spree that targeted aristocrats. Yu later stayed in the Shandong 山東 area with his clansman Li Yanguang 李延光.⁴⁷ Others used various excuses to take early retirement.⁴⁸

Therefore, it is unlikely that Liu Can's downfall was due solely to his leading role in the massacre. Rather, it had much to do with the result of the unanticipated reactions from the scholar-officials in the aftermath. Perhaps most of those who were involved in planning the massacre did not anticipate such an outcome. Zhu Quanzhong was particularly upset by the developments, sensing that they might jeopardize his plan.

There are other reasons that further contributed to the killing of Liu Can and his cohorts – a combination of the military situation, factional politics within Zhu's camp, and Zhu's personality. Despite his dominance at court, he faced great competition from other rivals immediately outside the mid-Yellow River valley. Li Keyong, Li Mao-

⁴³ *JTS* 179, p. 4661. *ZZTJ* 264, pp. 8622–23, basically follows the account given in *JTS*. An entry in *BMSY* 15, p. 297, records that after Zhang and his family were murdered, their corpses were thrown into the Yellow River. It is noteworthy that Zhang Rui was closely associated with Zhu at the beginning of Zhaozong's reign; see *JTS* 20A, pp. 740–41; *JWDS* 58, p. 787.

⁴⁴ For example, Xue Tinggui 薛廷珪, vice-director of the Ministry of Rituals, chose to adopt a passive stance in order to escape the purge of high court officials; see *JWDS* 68, p. 899.

⁴⁵ See *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8644.

⁴⁶ See *BMSY* 6, p. 143. Li rose to the post of chief minister in the Latter Liang, and Yang would serve the Former Shu regime (*Qian Shu* 前蜀); see *SGCQ* 41, p. 3972.

⁴⁷ See *JWDS* 67, p. 891. Li would later occupy an important position in the Latter Liang government. Li Dexiu 李德休, grandson of the Tang chief minister Li Jiang 李絳 (764–830), found refuge in the Hesuo area in the early part of the Tianyou era because of political disturbances in the two capitals likely stemming from the massacre; see *JWDS* 60, p. 810. Also see *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (Chen Menglei 陳夢雷, ed. [Taipei: Dingwen, 1985]), vol. 145, p. 18, row 1, for an entry from *Puyang bishi* 莆陽比事 about a *jinshi* graduate in the year Tianyou 2 examination who resigned from his official post because of the massacre and ended up growing plum trees as a living.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., the account of Cui Zhuo 崔瑒, *BMSY* 15, p. 299.

zhen, Liu Rengong, Wang Jian, Yang Congben 楊崇本, Yang Xingmi, Zhao Kuangning, and Li Jihui, as noted earlier, were military governors openly challenging his legitimacy. This certainly caused Zhu great alarm,⁴⁹ for they were a loose alliance that favored restoring imperial authority after Zhu brought Zhaozong back to Chang'an from Fengxiang. Geographically, the members were spread over the regions of Taiyuan, Fengxiang, Shu, Hopei, and Huaixi, practically surrounding Zhu in four directions. It was precisely in this tense situation that Zhu finally decided to murder Zhaozong to prevent any of these rivals from gaining control of the adult emperor.⁵⁰

Although Zhu was the most powerful warlord at the time, dominating the capital area and controlling the Zelu 澤潞 area, he was not strong enough to overpower these rivals. In fact, he suffered setbacks in his attempts to "pacify" the world. For example, when Zhao Kuangning allied with Wang Jian and Yang Xingmi just around the time of the massacre, they basically formed a southern blockade that represented a major threat to Zhu. In September of 905 Zhu launched a major offensive against Zhao. Only several weeks after defeating Zhao, he attacked Yang in Huainan, rejecting his advisor Jing Xiang's recommendation to return to Bianzhou. He marched an army of 200,000 southward, but upon arriving at Shouzhou 壽州 after traveling over 300 miles, many troops deserted due to bad weather and rugged terrain. As it became clear that his tactics were ineffective, Zhu was forced to retreat. On the way back, the enemy attacked from the rear, killing over 3,000 and looting supplies. Zhu regretted not listening to Jing and became moody and easily angered.⁵¹ When he returned to Bianzhou in December, he found it unacceptable that Liu Can, Jiang Xuanhui, and Zhang Tingfan had yet to complete the plan for his enthronement.

It was in such a state of mind that Wang Yin 王殷 and Zhao Yin-heng 趙殷衡, two of Zhu's subordinates, slandered Jiang and Zhang, accusing them of conspiring with Liu Can to attempt to prolong Tang's reign.⁵² Zhu's rage and suspicion worsened when Liu suggested that it was necessary to follow the proper ritual procedures to prepare for the final dynastic transfer.⁵³ As a result, Jiang was executed in January of 906, while Zhang and Liu were killed about half a month later. Both

⁴⁹ See *XWDS* 1, p. 9.

⁵⁰ *ZZTJ* 265, pp. 8634-35.

⁵¹ *JWDS* 2, p. 38; *ZZTJ* 265, pp. 8645-50.

⁵² *JTS* 20B, p. 801; *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8653. Liu, Jiang, and Zhang were aware of the slander and tried to accelerate the process.

⁵³ This includes the bestowal of the nine ritual gifts (*jiuxi* 九錫) that had been followed in most occasions of dynastic transfer since the Han dynasty. See the biography of Wang Mang, *Han shu* 漢書 (Ban Gu 班固, [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964]), 99A, pp. 4072-73.

Jiang and Zhang died with horrific cruelty: Zhang was drawn apart by horses. Zhu even ordered the burning of Jiang's corpse.⁵⁴

Taking into consideration all these factors, the White Horse Massacre was largely the consequence of Zhu Quanzhong's dynastic ambitions. Without Liu Can and his cohorts, Zhu might still have staged the massacre of court officials. Nonetheless, through them and their involvement in the massacre we learn a great deal about the literati discourse at the moment of dynastic transition, a political rupture that had significant implications for the cultural realm.

THE EXAMINATIONS AND THE MASSACRE: THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

As a political event, the White Horse Massacre is not unique; the killing of court officials at the moment of dynastic transition is not uncommon.⁵⁵ However, this atrocious event reveals something more than just politics. Many of those involved were guided by social and cultural considerations, rather than narrowly defined political motives. An important and readily discernible tension between Zhu's men and the victims revolved around debates over the civil examinations. Disagreement over the examinations generated great tension in late-Tang society, resulting in the alienation of a majority of the literati from the aristocrats who had come to monopolize examinations since the time of emperor Xuanzong. This was later pointed out by Ji Yougong 計有功 (fl. 1121–1161) and Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊 (1187–1269) during Song times.⁵⁶ Although the disagreement over the examinations was only one element among many in late-Tang social and cultural discourses, one can hardly overstate its role in the final collapse of a medieval aristocratic mentality that for centuries was based on the notion that the aristocratic elite society was specially entitled. The massacre can be seen in part as a rupture in these festering class tensions of the last half-century of the Tang.

⁵⁴ *ZZTJ* 265, pp. 8654–55.

⁵⁵ Ouyang Xiu compared the White Horse Massacre with the persecution of literati at the end of Eastern Han (*danggu zhi huo* 黨錮之禍). See his remarks in "Tang liuchen zhuan" 唐六臣傳, *XWDS* 35, pp. 381–82.

⁵⁶ See Ji's *Tangshi jishi* 唐詩記事 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965) 58, p. 892. Yu Yingshi 余英時 thinks that Ji is probably the first to make such a connection between the two. See his *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie: Songdai shidafu zhengzhi wenhua de yanjiu* 朱熹的歷史世界, 宋代士大夫政治文化的研究 (Taipei: Yunchen, 2003), vol. 1, pp. 296–97. Liu Kezhuang, in his *Houcun shihua* 後村詩話, also remarked that the White Horse Massacre was one of the key events in late-Tang that was related to the problems of the *jinshi* examination. This is cited in *Wudai shihua* 五代詩話, in Fu, *Wudai shishu huibian*, vol. 5, j. 5, p. 2830.

Besides the examination tension, ironically a strategy developed by the aristocrats to safeguard their privileged status also contributed to the social rupture. A comparison of the victims and the perpetrators in terms of degree-holding, family background, and official positions can provide us with a useful context to understand their antagonistic relations. While gaps in existing sources make it a very challenging task to reconstruct the social background of medieval literati, it is still possible to get a sense of the inter-connections among certain massacre victims. Table 1, above, demonstrates such ties. They are divided into two groups: a core group of seven and a secondary group of close to thirty. Many of them occupied high positions in the central government. *Jiu Wudai shi* notes that among the victims five were chief ministers and thirty some served in the Three Boards (*san sheng* 三省).⁵⁷

Ties established through the examinations are easily noticed. Zhao Chong and Dugu Sun, both among the core group (the first seven rows of table 1), were chief examiners in 889 and 896 respectively. While Zhao Chong and Pei Zhi were fellow *jinshi* graduates in 872, Cui Yuan, another member in the core group, obtained his *jinshi* degree when Zhao presided over the examinations in 889.

Pei Zhi, in the secondary group, was already retired at the time of the massacre. He held the post of chief minister and oversaw a total of three examinations. Liu Xun, also in the same group, assisted Pei in the 891 and 898 examinations.⁵⁸ In total, at least ten of the victims held *jinshi* degrees, certainly a very impressive number. Although many in the secondary group did not have degrees, the fact that some occupied key and “pure” positions in the central government suggests that they likely entered government through the *yin* 蔭 protection.⁵⁹ Besides degree-holding, many were also related by blood. Indeed, family ties likely account for the victimization of quite a few in the secondary group. For example, Cui Renlue, Dugu Tao, and Pei Lian only held the post of magistrate, and there is no evidence that they occupied any significant positions in central government earlier. Both Renlue and Lian were clansmen of the core group’s Cui Yuan and Pei Shu, respectively. One may surmise that Dugu Tao was related to Dugu Sun and Dugu Xian. Table I further shows that Dugu Xian, Pei Zhi, and Zhao

⁵⁷ See Zhang Wenwei’s biog., *JWDS* 18, p. 242.

⁵⁸ See Wang Dingbao 王定保, *Tang zhiyan jiaozhu* 唐摭言校注, ed. and coll. Jiang Hanchong 姜漢椿 (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue yuan, 2003) 8, p. 155.

⁵⁹ The *yin* privilege was a “process by which officials in service were rewarded the authorization for one of more sons to be qualified for official appointments when they matured without undergoing qualification tests”; Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1985), p. 581.

Chong had already retired from office at the time of the massacre. So, it is unclear why they were targeted. Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that they were considered threats to Zhu, as in the case of Zhang Rui, discussed earlier. Nonetheless, it seems that personal and socio-cultural factors were more likely the reason.⁶⁰

The composition of the perpetrators is quite different. Table 2 contains five who are attested as the massacre's perpetrators and two who likely were perpetrators (Zhang and Su, as discussed below). Despite the small size, one can see that this is not a very coherent group. In terms of social background, Liu Can and Zhang Ce came from the "old clans," while Jiang Xuanhui and Zhang Tingfan were of lowly origins. Li Zhen, while not from a prominent clan, was a great-grandson of the famous mid-Tang general Li Baozhen 李抱真, who was pivotal in building up the military strength of Zelu province in Shanxi.⁶¹ While Liu Can was a *jinshi* graduate and was known for his literary talents, Li Zhen failed the *jinshi* examination repeatedly during the Xiantong (861–874) and Qianfu 乾符 (875–879) periods.

Jiang Xuanhui and Zhang Tingfan, as delegates of Zhu Quanzhong in Luoyang, were largely serving his political interests, and were disposed of soon after the massacre. Both were of lowly background. Jiang was said to be of "lowly 賤" origins,⁶² and Zhang began his career as an entertainer 優人.⁶³ A special episode links Zhang more directly to the massacre. This happened in the spring of 905 when Zhu recommended Zhang to the position of chamberlain for ceremonials. However, Pei Shu, likely speaking on behalf of the great clans, rejected the recommendation because of Zhang's commoner origins. Greatly enraged by this, Zhu removed Pei from the post of chief minister.⁶⁴ Zhang was certainly upset about this critique of his family background.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ For example, Zhu Quanzong was particularly hostile to Zhao Chong, complaining frequently about his snobbishness. See Qian Yi's 錢易 *Nanbu xinshu* 南部新書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), section *jia* 甲, pp. 7–8; and *Tang zhiyan jiaozhu* 6, p. 129.

⁶¹ See biog. *JWDS* 18, p. 251.

⁶² *XTS* 223B, p. 6360.

⁶³ *XTS* 223B, p. 6361.

⁶⁴ Sima Guang placed this in Tianyou 2, mo. 3 (905); *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8641. Ouyang Xiu mistakenly dates it as year 3; See *XWDS* 35, p. 375. *Taichang qing* is a rank 3 position. See the "Baiguan zhi" 百官志 chapter in *XTS* 48, p. 1241. Sun Guodong 孫國棟 notes that the Court of Imperial Sacrifices (Taichang si 太常寺) was the most prestigious among the Nine Bureaus (*jiusi* 九寺), and top officials were mostly "pure stream" positions, unlike those in the other eight bureaus. See his *Tangdai zhongyang zhongyao wenguan qianzhuan tujing yanjiu* 唐代中央重要文官遷轉途徑研究 (Hong Kong: Longmen shuju, 1978), p. 143.

⁶⁵ See Su Dun's 蘇循 biog., *XWDS* 35, pp. 380–81.

The cases of Li Zhen and Liu Can reveal more about the social and cultural dimensions of the massacre. Before discussing their roles in the massacre, it would be useful first to consider two other figures listed below, in table 2 – Su Jie and Zhang Ce. Although their connections with the massacre cannot be firmly ascertained, there is sufficient evidence to include them tentatively on the list. Moreover, these cases reveal the way in which the examinations figured in the massacre, and thus enrich our understanding of the cultural tension between the victims and the perpetrators.

Su Jie likely descended from a “new family” whose rise in social standing was rather recent, coming especially through the examinations. His grandfather served as prefect of Chenzhou 陳州, and his father Dun

Table 2. Perpetrators of the White Horse Massacre

CM = Chief Minister

NAME	DEGREE	FAMILY BACKGROUND	POSITIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES
Zhu Quanzhong 朱全忠	none	commoner	Prince of Liang 梁王	
Liu Can 柳燦	<i>jinshi</i> 899	member Hedong 河東 Lius	CM	<i>DKJKBZ</i> 24:1035–1036
Li Zhen 李振	none, many attempts	descendant Li Baozhen 李抱真 (733–794)	Several posts in Zhu Quanzhong's entourage	
Jiang Xuanhui 蔣玄暉	none	commoner	<i>shumi shi</i> 樞密使	
Zhang Tingfan 張廷範	none	commoner	Chamberlain of Ceremony, Mayor of Henan 河南尹	
Zhang Ce 張策	none, many attempts	member Dunhuang 燉煌 Zhangs	Secretary of Zhu Quanzhong 掌書記	<i>JWDS</i> 18:244
Su Jie 蘇楷	none, failed after re-test	unclear	Imperial Diarist (<i>qiju lang</i> 起居郎) ^A	<i>XWDS</i> 35:380; <i>JTS</i> 20B:792 (Annals of Emperor Aidi)

^A *XWDS* biog. indicates he was Imperial Diarist after Zhaozong's death, but unclear if this was before the massacre; “Annals” states clearly that Su was already in such a position before the massacre.

obtained the *jinshi* degree in the Xiantong period.⁶⁶ The standard histories have no friendly words for Jie and his father, describing them as treacherous and sycophantic. Jie, in particular, is said to have been vulgar. Since his father rose to the post of director of the Ministry of Rites in Zhaozong's court, it is quite likely that he passed the *jinshi* examination in 895 because of his father's position.

However, because of complaints about the blatant corruption in this examination, Zhaozong ordered the twenty-five graduates to be reexamined. As a result, a total of ten failed. While six of them were allowed to sit for the examination in the future, the other four were prohibited from ever taking the *jinshi* examination again because of the vulgarity of their work.⁶⁷ Jie was one of the four. Certainly, he was disgraced and humiliated, and it is said that as a result he bore a grudge against the emperor and court officials, particularly *jinshi* degree-holders.

With the dramatic demise of the imperial house, Jie emerged ten years later as an adherant to Zhu Quanzhong's regime. After Zhaozong's death, he was involved in deliberations about the posthumous title and temple name for the deceased emperor. Perhaps because of his earlier humiliating experience, he insisted on some less respectful titles for Zhaozong.⁶⁸ This took place in the 10th month of Tianyou 2d year, just a few months after the massacre.⁶⁹ Jie was involved in the deliberation in his official capacity as imperial diarist, a position likely taken soon after the regicide.⁷⁰ It is also clear that he was closely associated with Liu Can and Zhang Tingfan. If his disgrace in the examination led him to degrade Zhaozong's reputation, he would be equally likely to have wanted to avenge himself against court officials responsible for the humiliation that he suffered ten years earlier. In fact, among the victims in the core group, Lu Yi was one of the two examiners appointed by Zhaozong in 895 to reexamine the candidates!⁷¹

In the case of Zhang Ce, some sources link him directly to the massacre, yet none of the standard histories draws on such a connection. In fact, despite placing Zhang's biography in "Tang liuchen zhuan,"

⁶⁶ See *DKJKBZ* 27, p. 1240.

⁶⁷ See Zhaozong's edict in *DKJKBZ* 24, pp. 1020–21.

⁶⁸ *BMSY* 17, p. 325; *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8650.

⁶⁹ See *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8650 and "Annals of Aidi," in *JTS* 20B, p. 800.

⁷⁰ According to "Annals of Aidi," *JTS* 20B, p. 792, he already occupied this position. See the biography of his father, Su Dun, in *JWDS* 60, p. 811.

⁷¹ The other is Feng Wo 馮渥; see *DKJKBZ* 24, p. 1020.

Ouyang Xiu portrayed him in a relatively positive light. If Zhang was involved in the massacre, it was likely also related to his humiliating experience in writing the examination. Zhang committed himself to the Buddhist faith early on and lived the life of a Buddhist monk. However, he later returned home and sat for the examinations, seeking a position in the government. According to *Tang zhiyan*, Zhang once sat for the examinations when Zhao Chong was the examiner. If so, this must have been in 889. Probably, Zhao knew that Zhang was from a noble background and he resented that such a scholar would flit from one teaching to another. Moreover, when Zhang later sat for the Erudite Literatus (*boxue hongci* 博學宏詞) examination, he was again failed by Zhao Chong. In particular, Zhao openly scolded Zhang and swore that he would fail Zhang whenever he was in charge of the examinations. Eventually, Zhang joined Zhu Quanzhong's government. *Tang zhiyan* explicitly states that Zhao's murder in the massacre was closely related to this.⁷²

Despite obvious differences, Li Zhen's case shows similarities with that of Zhang Ce and Su Jie specifically; both experienced repeated failures in the examinations and were humiliated by examiners from the great clans. Like the others, Li took it personally. Disgruntled with court officials, he made the recommendation of throwing the victims' bodies into the Yellow River so that the "pure stream" would become "muddy."⁷³ In fact, all three cases – Li Zhen, Su Jie, and Zhang Ce – point to a similar animosity towards court officials, which is further complicated by a general animus towards the aristocratic elite.

Such daring and sweeping attacks were not merely a few isolated cases. It was part of the historical unfolding in the late-Tang that took at least half a century in the making. The dominance of great clansmen who "monopolized" the examinations since the reign of emperor Xuanzong fueled tensions in a highly polarized literati community. For example, the renowned poet Luo Yin 羅隱 (833–909), grew resentful towards the state after failing the *jinshi* examination ten times. But not only are we dealing with resentment over the examinations, there was anger as well that stemmed from a sense of alienation from the great clans.⁷⁴

Huang Tao 黃滔 (840–911), an acquaintance of Luo, lamented that in his day it was rare for one to pass the *jinshi* examination in merely

⁷² See the entry "Fangchu budi" 反初不第 in *Tang zhiyan jiaozhu* 11, p. 222.

⁷³ See *XWDS* 43, pp. 470–71; and *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8643.

⁷⁴ *BMSY* 6, p. 142. See also Tao Yue 陶岳, *Wudai shi bu* 五代史補, in *Wudai shishu hui-bian*, vol. 5, j. 1, p. 2481.

three to five attempts; most would spend ten to twenty years.⁷⁵ This was obviously based on his own experience, as he spent over two decades before finally getting his *jinshi* degree in 895.⁷⁶ Although he might not have seen the specific privilege enjoyed by candidates from the great clans, many late-Tang scholars who failed repeatedly in the examinations were likely to have experienced bad feelings towards the state and the ruling elite.

Late-Tang sources testify to the ubiquity of this sentiment. A stanza from Hu Zeng's 胡曾 poem "Failing the Examination" ("Xiadi" 下第) captures this frustration: "As the new cassia branches out every year in the Imperial Palace/ No common folk is allowed to break a branch."⁷⁷ In an entry in *Beimeng suoyan*, this stanza was cited together with the remark that Luo Yin shared such sentiments.⁷⁸ The context must be explained. The entry is titled "Gao Chan gained fame with his poetry" 高蟾以詩策名, and it states that Gao's poems were being criticized because they failed to adhere to the canonical principles of *feng* 風 and *ya* 雅. Nonetheless, he was regarded highly by court officials because his poem "Failing the Examination" showed contempt for the outcome of the examinations without any sign of contempt for members from great clans.⁷⁹

All these examples point to the animosity shared by many literati towards those who dominated court politics and monopolized the examination system. The expression of this animosity can be seen as a logical consequence, a rupture due to increasing tension.

Among the perpetrators we are left with Liu Can, considered by many to have been the key architect of the massacre. As a collaborator of Zhu Quanzhong, he was also seen by many as a disloyal subject of the Tang, an image that became firmly established when Ouyang Xiu placed his biography in the section "Jianchen 姦臣" in *Xin Tang shu*.⁸⁰ However, a more careful assessment of his role in the massacre raises questions that lead us away from such a simple picture.

⁷⁵ See "Duan xianbei qi" 段先輩啓, in *QTW* 824, p. 3a.

⁷⁶ See *DKJKBZ* 24, pp. 1023-24; *SGCQ* 95, p. 4633.

⁷⁷ "上林新桂年年發, 不許平人折一枝." See *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, comp. Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979) 647, p. 7438. "Zhe gui" 折桂, the "breaking of a branch of cassia" is a standard allusion to success in the examinations.

⁷⁸ This is also cited in *BMSY* 7, p. 166, followed by a comment on a similar complaint by Luo Yin, which upset those who were related to powerful officials.

⁷⁹ *BMSY* 7, p. 165.

⁸⁰ See *XTS* 223B, pp. 6359-60.

Liu was from a prominent Hedong 河東 Liu clan, whose members included the famous statesmen Liu Gongchuo 柳公綽 (768–832), Liu Gongquan 柳公權 (778–865), and Liu Pi 柳玭 (d. ca. 899).⁸¹ However, *Xin Tang shu* depicts him as a man of uncultured character who was often belittled by his clansmen.⁸² Such an image might have been tainted by Ouyang's own moral judgment. Liu's biography in *Jiu Tang shu*, which also describes the tension between him and his clansmen, clearly describes him more positively.⁸³

Liu Can's grandfather was a cousin of Gongchuo and Gongquan, both famous statesmen. Gongquan, in particular, is known for his calligraphy. Many members of this line obtained degrees and rose to prominent positions at court. In comparison, Can's line was less successful. While his great-grandfather Zihua 子華 had a relatively successful political career, his grandfather Gongqi 公器 and father Zun 遵 probably did not have any examination degree, nor did they serve in the government.⁸⁴ Excelling in literature 文學 and with a special interest in history, Liu obtained his *jinshi* degree in 899. It was because of his literary talent that Zhaozong promoted him to the post of chief minister within only four years after he passed the examination,⁸⁵ a remarkably fast track to the top of officialdom.⁸⁶ The Latter Tang (923–936) official Zhang Zhao 張昭, in particular, identified him as one of the four officials most swiftly promoted from low ranks to the post of chief minister during the Tang.⁸⁷

Although Liu came from a great clan, it seems that this did not help his political career at all. Evidence suggests that he had much difficulty in passing the *jinshi* examination. The most interesting account of his trouble is furnished by Liu Kai 柳開 (947–1000), an early-Song advocate of *guwen* 古文 ("ancient composition"). In a letter seeking support from the examiner Li Fang 李昉 (925–996), Kai wrote that many tried to stop Can from getting the *jinshi* degree:

⁸¹ See *JTS* 165, pp. 4300–13.

⁸² *XTS* 223B, p. 6359.

⁸³ *JTS* 179, p. 4669.

⁸⁴ *JTS* 165, p. 4313. Can's biography in *JTS* 179, p. 4669, mentions their names only.

⁸⁵ *JTS* 179, p. 4670.

⁸⁶ According to Sun Guodong's estimate, it took roughly 23.6 years in the late-Tang for an official to move from an entry position to the post of chief minister. See his *Tangdai zhongyang zhongyao wenguan qianzhuan tujing yanjiu*, p. 234, table 103.

⁸⁷ See *QIW* 864, pp. 18a–b, and Zhang's biog. *Dongdu shilue* 東都事略, cited in Chen Hongchi 陳鴻墀, comp., *Quan Tang wen jishi* 全唐文紀事 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959) 99, pp. 1231–32. See also Hu Zhenheng's 胡震亨 (1569–1645) *Tang yin gui qian* 唐音癸笈 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957) 26, p. 232.

Kai's great-grandfather was named Can. During the Guanghua period of the Tang, he sat for the [*jinshi*] examination when Zhao Guangfeng was the examiner. [At first], Zhao placed him last [among those who passed]. However, someone sent in letters to slander my great-grandfather. When Zhao received a letter, he raised [the rank] up one position. At the end, he received a total of twenty-six letters. Since Zhao raised the rank up a place every time he received a letter, as twenty-seven candidates passed the examination that year, my great-grandfather therefore obtained the second rank. If there were more than twenty-six letters, [my great-grandfather] would have gotten the top rank.⁸⁸ 開之大王父, 諱燦. 唐光化中趙公, 諱光逢, 司貢士也, 實來應舉. 趙將以榜末處之. 遽有移書于趙公毀我先君者, 趙公始得一書, 乃遷其名進一等. 以至于前後得謗書二十六通. 趙公得一書而必一進名. 是歲也, 趙下二十七人. 故我先君名止于第二. 苟是時書未止于二十六人之毀也, 即必冠乎首矣.

Although the stated relationship between Kai and Can is fictitious,⁸⁹ this account still allows us to make the point that Liu Can must have had quite a few enemies. One may surmise that those from the great clans or some of his own clansmen were involved in this effort to block him from getting into the government.

Culturally, Can's training and intellectual orientation were not atypical of members from the old clans. The "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 section of *Xin Tang shu* lists a number of his works, including studies of the calendar and rhymes of surnames. There was a work on historiography, and one that likely discussed the issue of talent.⁹⁰ Although it was his literary talent that propelled his political career, it is quite possible that he could have climbed up the ladder of officialdom through his training in traditional scholarship, as he was first appointed to the Bureau of Historiography with support from Yan Yao 顏薨 (fl. 900), who was in charge of the Bureau at that time.⁹¹

It is likely that his personality and his remarkable rise in officialdom contributed to the tension between him and high officials at court who took pride in their identity as members of the great clans. Liu Can

⁸⁸ See "Shang zhu si Li xueshi shu" 上主司李學士書, in *Quan Song wen* 全宋文 (Liu Lin 劉琳 and Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊, eds. Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1989), vol. 3, j. 118, p. 611.

⁸⁹ Zhu Shangshu 祝尙書 has shown clearly that Liu Kai falsified his relationship with Liu Can; Zhu, "Liu Kai nianpu" 柳開年譜, in *Songdai wenhua yanjiu* 宋代文化研究 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1993), vol. 3, p. 114.

⁹⁰ They are *Zheng runwei li* 正閏位曆, *Xingshi yunlue* 姓氏韻略, *Meng jun* 夢雋, and *Liushi shishi* 柳氏釋史. See *XTS* 58, pp. 1461, 1501; 59, p. 1558; 60, p. 1625, respectively.

⁹¹ See his biog., *XTS* 223B, p. 6359.

was described as flattering and frivolous. Fellow chief ministers Pei Shu, Cui Yuan, and Dugu Sun, all from the great clans, looked down on him because he did not follow protocol.⁹²

There is no doubt about Liu's leading role in the massacre. Besides going along with Zhu Quanzhong, he was motivated to avenge such slights. While allying with Zhu was determined by the political situation, the latter motive was guided by a combination of personal and socio-cultural factors. By Tianyou 1st year, all of those who surrounded the emperor were Zhu's men from Bianzhou (*bianren* 汴人),⁹³ and most of those who opposed Zhu or threatened his dynastic ambitions had been killed or removed from the court.⁹⁴ For those who cooperated with Zhu, there were few options. They were concerned for both their personal safety and the safety of their families. One such minister, Yang She, is said to have remarked to his son on the day of his appointment "I cannot escape this net of calamity soon to envelop us, a net certain to entangle you as well."⁹⁵ Many officials were trapped by the same "net" and the concern was not merely personal, but also that of the survival of the whole clan. Promotion to high office was often seen as a great danger. It is therefore not unreasonable for one to feel sympathetic toward Yang She, whose role in the dynastic transition was largely passive.

While Liu Can was far more active than Yang in this final episode of dynastic transition, concerns for individual and family safety likely played a role in his involvement in the massacre. Nonetheless, traditional historians such as Ouyang Xiu were largely hostile to Liu Can and Yang She, considering them treacherous for that action. Hu Sanxing also expressed harsh words for Liu, complaining that the Liu clan had been prominent for generations and known particularly for upright behavior and scholarship. However, Can brought great shame and ruin to them, and was responsible for the "destruction of a clan of nine generations of ministers in merely one act!"⁹⁶ His main crime

⁹² *ZZTJ* 265, p. 8641. See also Liu Can's biographies in *JTS* 179, p. 4670 and *XTS* 223B, p. 6359.

⁹³ See the Annals of Zhaozong in *JTS* 20A, p. 779. Earlier (Qianning 4), the imperial army was reorganized or "disbanded." At that time, the emperor was under the control of Han Jian 韓建. See *JTS* 20A, p. 761.

⁹⁴ For example, in Tianyou 3, when Zhu ordered the murder of more than seven hundred eunuchs at court, those who served as Army Supervisors (*jianjun* 監軍) or other positions in local governments were to be executed by the local governors. See *JTS* 20A, p. 775.

⁹⁵ *XWDS* 35, p. 377. Translated by Richard L. Davis, *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2004), p. 288.

⁹⁶ *ZZTJ* 264, p. 8624.

was of course the role that he played in the massacre, yet in view of the precarious political environment of the time, it remains necessary to examine how central a role he really played, and the underlying motivations.

Liu certainly took advantage of the situation to eliminate his foes,⁹⁷ and there is little doubt that the combination of political and personal motives contributed to the drastic decision. It remains unsettling that Can would play such a key role in the massacre, given the fact that he was also a member of a prominent Shandong clan. Moreover, from his promotion to the post of chief minister in the spring of 904 to the massacre in July of 905, how serious was the personal tension between Liu and other court officials, such that it drove him to murder court officials?

The character of the massacre, including a “killing spree,” suggests that the underlying cause lies more in the “collective” resentments, a whole range of personal grudges generated by both social and cultural forces. Antagonisms existed among three main camps: the aristocrats, literati of modest social standings, and the socially obscure. Moreover, the unfolding of antagonism led to a significant realignment of the literati community not only at the moment of dynastic transition but through the Five Dynasties.

The division between aristocrats and the rest of the literati community dissolved as the great clans faded away during the Five Dynasties. This was the result of a combination of forces that often unfolded in violence. First was the antagonism between the so-called “pure (*qing* 清)” and “muddy (*zhuo* 濁)” officials, a centuries-old phrase suggesting that at the highest level of the court there was always a high-minded group (the pure) who were dedicated to ideals of governance, but also baser selfish men (the muddy) who were considered low-born career-seekers. Second was an intensified urge to assess one’s worth – an urge seen both among aristocrats and literati of modest social background. It ultimately dismantled the boundary that separated the aristocracy, or merely the idea of aristocracy, from the rest of the literati community.

⁹⁷ Jiang Weigong and Gao Wenhui have attempted to defend Liu; see idem, “‘Baima zhihuo’ kaoxi,” pp. 29–34. Despite the fact that there is much to be examined in the final judgment of Liu Can’s “crime,” as our discussion of Liu Kai’s letter to Li Fang clearly suggests, this study is basically an effort to reinforce Lü Simian’s 呂思勉 view in his *Sui Tang Wudai shi* 隋唐五代史. Unfortunately, Jiang and Gao do not provide any new evidence to exonerate Liu Can.

SURVIVAL STRATEGY AND THE
DISMANTLING OF THE BOUNDARY

The boundary that defined aristocratic society became much weakened by the late-Tang. Besides the obvious sociopolitical upheavals, the weakening was also caused by the aristocrats themselves, though they may not have been conscious of the consequences of their actions. Increasingly, aristocrats in the late-Tang came under attack by both the newly risen military elites and the literati community in general.

As shown earlier, antagonistic sentiments towards high court officials were often shared among literati, especially those who failed the examinations repeatedly. Many of them were profoundly disappointed about their failure to fulfill the life-long dream of achieving the highly coveted *jinshi* degree and thus a successful political career.⁹⁸ Although some would eventually “realize” their political dream in provincial governments, they nonetheless cultivated a strong sense of contempt for court officials and the central government. This resulted largely from corruption in the examinations that privileged candidates from the great clans, but one should also view this from a cultural perspective.

The frustration of unfulfilled career ambition was devastating to scholars who expended years to master the Confucian classics and literary skills for the important moment in which they could show off their talents to the world. The denial of a reasonable chance of success in the examinations contributed to their contempt, and this further led to the belief that they were more qualified than those who obtained the *jinshi* degree and moved on to a smooth career at court simply because of their aristocratic background.

The case of Luo Yin illustrates this frustration vividly. His literary talent earned him great fame nationwide. However, he made more enemies than friends because of his arrogance. As a result, he failed the *jinshi* examination repeatedly.⁹⁹ It is said that after the Huangchao Rebellion, some court officials discussed appointing him to a position in the government, but this was blocked by Wei Yifan 韋貽範,¹⁰⁰ who mentioned a rather unpleasant encounter that he had with Luo earlier to support his argument:

⁹⁸ See Xue Yajun 薛亞軍, “Zhuqiu yu huanmie, wan Tang shizi keju xintai de wenhua toushi” 追求與幻滅, 晚唐士子科舉心態的文化透視, *Huanghe keji daxue xuebao* 黃河科技大學學報 3.1 (2001), pp. 122–28, for a brief discussion of this issue.

⁹⁹ See *JWDS* 24, p. 326, and *Wudai shi bu* 1, p. 2481.

¹⁰⁰ Wei was one of the chief ministers in Zhaozong’s court. See Wang Pu 王溥, *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1955) 2, p. 17.

I once traveled with Luo [Yin] in the same boat, though we did not know each other. The boatman told him that: “There are court officials [on this boat].” Luo replied: “What court officials! I can match a few of them with my feet holding the brush!” If he got his [*jinshi*] degree and court appointment, we will then be [as worthless] as chaff!¹⁰¹ 某曾與之同舟而載，雖未相識，舟人告云：“此有朝官。”羅曰：“是何朝官！我腳夾筆，亦可以敵得數輩。”必若登科通籍，吾徒爲秕糠也。

Considered one of the most renowned writers in the late-Tang by many of his contemporaries, Luo failed the *jinshi* examination at least ten times. To many frustrated scholars, he symbolized the injustice of the examination system.¹⁰² In most cases, these scholars would simply express their frustration in writings, acting them out in relatively moderate ways, like the case of Luo Yin or Hu Zeng. Others took more extreme actions.

Li Sanfu 李山甫, after failing the *jinshi* examination repeatedly in the Xiantong period, found a position in the Weibo government serving the military governor Le Yanzhen 樂彥禎. In 884 Wang Duo 王鐸 (d. 884) was appointed to the post of military governor of Yichang 義昌. Wang came from the prominent Taiyuan Wang clan and held the post of chief minister earlier. On his way to Yichang, he paid a visit to Le in Weizhou 魏州, traveling with an entourage of over 300, including courtesans and literati advisors from prominent families also. Envious of Duo's wealth and women, Yanzhen's son Congxun 從訓 was further incited by Li Sanfu, out of his earlier frustration in the examinations, to arrange for a few hundred soldiers to attack Wang when he reached Gaoji bo 高雞泊 in Zhangnan 漳南 (in Beizhou 貝州). They looted their belongings and kidnapped the women. Wang and his men were murdered. In the end, Le Yanzhen simply told the court that Wang and his men were murdered by lawless thugs on their way

¹⁰¹ *BMSY* 6, p. 142.

¹⁰² In remarking on the extreme difficulty of passing the examinations, Huang Tao named Luo one of the three most renowned literati who ultimately failed the *jinshi* examination. See “Sizhi Chen gong muzhi ming” 司直陳公墓誌銘, *QTW* 826, pp. 9b–10a. In 900, Wei Zhuang 韋莊 (836–910) recommended that the court award *jinshi* degrees posthumously to renowned literati such as Li He 李賀 (791–817) and Jia Dao 賈島 (779–843), who died without receiving the degree. Luo Yin was the only one on his list who was still alive at the time. See “Qi zhuisi Li He Huangfu Song deng jinshi jidi zhou” 乞追賜李賀皇甫松等進士及第奏, *QTW* 889, pp. 3b–4a. Wu Rong 吳融 (*jinshi* 889) composed a memorial for an official making a similar request; see “Dai Wang dafu qing zhuisi Fang Gan deng jidi shu” 代王大夫請追賜方干等及第疏, *QTW* 820, pp. 18a–b. An entry titled “Qu ming ru” 屈名儒 in *Jianjie lu* 鑑誠錄 mentions that Zhang Wenwei and Feng Shunqing 封舜卿 also memorialized the court to bestow the *jinshi* title to fifteen deceased literati; see He Guangyuan 何光遠, *Jianjie lu* (*Wudai shi shu huibian*, vol. 10) 8, p. 5933; also cited by Xu Song in *DKJKBZ* 24, pp. 1036–37.

to Yichang.¹⁰³ As the court was weak, it was unable to take any measure to discipline Congxun. This atrocity probably had other political causes, such as the politics within Yichang province or that between Yichang and Weibo.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, there is little doubt that Li Sanfu was guided by a personal grudge against court officials, one that was likely expressed in terms of the difference in their social standings.¹⁰⁵ Hu Zhenheng believed that since Wang Duo served as the examiner in Xiantong 5th year, given the fact that Li repeatedly failed the examinations during the same period, Wang must have been one of the examiners who failed Li.¹⁰⁶

Besides anger over the injustice done to them, it is also important to recognize the broader cultural implications of these bloody events. The case of Gao Chan noted earlier reveals the way in which aristocrats reacted to the imminent collapse of the Tang order. Although many of the late-Tang uprisings since emperor Yizong's 懿宗 (r. 860–874) reign may be characterized as “class wars,” the “general antagonism toward the idea of the great clans” was far more complicated than a simple social dichotomy.¹⁰⁷

In our sources, three notions that appear frequently in late-Tang and Five Dynasties sources display the tension that unfolded at the end of the Tang – *qing* (pure), *zhuo* (muddy), and *fubo* 浮薄 (frivolous). Although the contexts behind the usages of the terms sometimes could extend their meanings, and will not be elaborated further here, nonetheless these words often served to separate aristocrats from the rest of society. The notion of *fubo* in particular was used to characterize the more unrestrained literati culture generated by the examination discourse; this culture emphasized literary skills, compared to the aristocratic culture that stressed ritual knowledge and disciplines. However, by the

¹⁰³ See *BMSY* 13, p. 268; *JTS* 164, p. 4285 (the number killed was just over 10); *XTS* 185, p. 5407 (more than 300 killed); *ZZTJ* 256, p. 8317 (more than 300 killed).

¹⁰⁴ Fang Rui 房銳 speculates that Yang Quanmei 楊全玫, the incumbent military governor of Yichang, might have had a role in the atrocity simply because he was unwilling to relinquish his power to Wang; see Fang, “Cong Wang Duo siyin kan wan Tang fanzhen zhi huo ji luodi shiren de xintai” 從王鐸死因看晚唐藩鎮之禍及落第士人的心態, *Tianjin daxue xuebao* 天津大學學報 4.1 (2002), p. 53. Cai Jingbo 蔡靜波 and Yang Dongning 楊東寧, “Lun wan Tang keju yu luodi shizi de xintai, yi *Beimeng suoyan wei li*” 論晚唐科舉與落第士子的心態以夢瑣言為例, *Tangdu xuekan* 唐都學刊 21.4 (2005), pp. 26–27, lists the cases of Li Sanfu, Zhang Ce, and the White Horse Massacre as directly related to late-Tang examination discourse.

¹⁰⁵ See *Nanbu xinshu, jian ding* 建, p. 52; also his poem “Xiadi woji Lu yuanwai zhao you Qujiang” 下第臥疾盧員外召遊曲江, in *Quan Tang shi* 643, p. 7365, where Li mentioned failing the examination in relation to his “lowly” origin.

¹⁰⁶ See his *Tang yin gui qian* 26, pp. 230–31. This is also discussed in Fang Rui, “Cong Wang Duo siyin,” p. 54.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, “Last Years of a Great Clan,” p. 100.

end of the Tang, it was often used to describe the pretentious attitude of those from the great clans.¹⁰⁸ This change in semantics reflects to some extent a corresponding change in aristocratic culture, likely due to the monopoly the aristocrats held in the examinations.

We see the tension attested clearly in a specific example (one of many in the sources), which brings in the notion of “frivolousness” as related to politico-cultural antagonism across different segments of the literati community. In making a point about “class hatred,” David Johnson discusses an “editorial tirade” against great clans that is found in *Jiu Wudai shi*’s biography of Li Zhuanmei 李專美 (ca. 884–ca. 945):

Zhuanmei’s ancestors were from the main branch of Guzang 姑藏. Together with the Cuis 崔氏 from the small branch of Qinghe 清河, the Lus 盧氏 from the second branch of a northern ancestor, and the Zhengs 鄭氏 from Zhaoguo 昭國, they constituted the four great clans. None of them admired talent or virtuous deeds, nor did they respect the holding of office. Even though some of them were commoners, obliged to walk about on foot, they regarded court nobles as quite insignificant. In marriage, they did not mix with other clans. [For those] who wished to form marriage ties with their clans, it was necessary to offer them lavish gifts. Emperor Taizong of the Tang had complained about this corrupt practice in his edicts, but at the end, they were unable to correct it. Even a less successful member among them would say, “My clan is Cui, or Lu, or Li, or Zheng; what more could you ask for? For those who had a successful career, they [felt like that] they were up in the sky, thousands of *li* away [from the human world], so that people hardly [dared] to pay them a visit. This is what their frivolity 浮薄 and conceit were like. Only Zhuanmei had never mentioned [his] prominent [background] in his speech. In meeting scholar-officials from families of lower social standings, he treated them courteously, and people praised him for this.”¹⁰⁹

Johnson takes this as a reflection of the kind of “class hatred” that ultimately led to the murder of members of the great clans.¹¹⁰ The passage

¹⁰⁸ See Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南, “Zouxiang zaizao: shitan shi shiji qianzhong qi de wenchen qunti” 走向再造, 試談十世紀前中期的文臣群體, in *Qi Xia xiansheng jinian wenji* 漆俠先生紀念文集 (Baoding shi: Hebei daxue, 2002), p. 84. The quotation cited earlier from *Zizhi tongjian* that outlines the massacre uses the notion to identify both the aristocrats and those who entered government through the examinations.

¹⁰⁹ *JWDS* 93, p. 1230. Part of the translation is adapted from Johnson, “Last Years of a Great Clan,” pp. 100–1. Ouyang Xiu, in biog. of Cui Jujian 崔居儉, offered a similar view; see *XWDS* 55, p. 635.

¹¹⁰ Johnson, “Last Years of a Great Clan,” p. 100. However, it may be more appropriate

clearly complains about arrogant and snobbish aristocrats, even at a time when aristocrats continued to believe in their superior position in society.¹¹¹ The importance for our present discussion lies more in our ability to see a complete reflection of literati culture during the Five Dynasties period. Besides the sweeping attack on the frivolity of aristocrats, we also have a hint of a *shift* in the dynamics of literati culture at the moment of dynastic transition in the early-tenth century. We can sense that better by looking briefly at Zhuanmei's career.

Li Zhuanmei reached adulthood at the end of the Tang. He was a member of the prominent Longxi 隴西 Li clan, but his "humbleness" – the virtue that he was being praised for – is unlikely a case of idiosyncrasy. The self-perception of members from the great clans was a combination of mental construct and socio-political supports that they enjoyed during much of the medieval period. By the end of the Tang and Five Dynasties, although the political and social bases were largely destroyed, the "aristocratic" mentality had yet to dissolve completely. This was a major force that accounts for the 'snobbish' behavior that some of these people, as also described in the passage, exhibited.

By the time Zhuanmei died around 945, he had served three of the five regimes during the Five Dynasties, and thus was well aware of the changing political culture. His aristocratic background certainly helped his career. For example, Zhang Quanyi, the metropolitan prefect of Henan, recommended him for a court position in the Latter Liang government precisely because of his pedigree.¹¹² Overall, his political career was smooth, owing largely to this "unpretentious" personality. It is said that he was approachable and knew how to avoid conflict. This is precisely the quality that accounted for his relative "success" in politics. This unpretentious quality was likely a strategy for survival during the precarious time of dynastic transition.

Although the image and perception of the revered status of the aristocrats lingered on by the mid-tenth century, the dramatic decline in the family fortunes of the great clans must have been felt already by many at the end of the Tang. Although we cannot conclusively deter-

to consider this a view articulated in the early Song. *Jiu Wudai shi*, completed in 974 under Song government commission, was compiled by such officials as Hu Meng 扈蒙 (915–986) and Li Fang; see Wang Gungwu, "The *Chiu Wu-tai shih* and History-writing during the Five Dynasties," in idem, *The Chineseness of China: Selected Essays* (Hong Kong: Oxford U.P., 1991), p. 25.

¹¹¹ *Beimeng suoyan* provides many interesting examples; e.g., Xue Baoxun 薛保遜, together with his wife and his son; see *BMSY* 3, p. 61; and 4, p. 84.

¹¹² *JWDS* 93, p. 1229. Sun received top rank in the 878 *jinshi* examination, thus the *zhuangyuan*; see *DKJKBZ* 23, pp. 979–80.

mine motivation in the case of Li Zhuanmei, there is supporting evidence that shows that some were strategically adopting an unpretentious attitude as a way of risk management since the late-Tang.¹¹³

This reveals an anxiety that was likely shared by some members of the great clans. When put in the context of another story that involves Liu Pin, such an anxiety becomes more obvious. Liu was given samples of writings by a Mou Xiang 牟矸 when he arrived at Yuzhou 渝州 on his way to take up a post in Luzhou 瀘州. He praised these writings despite their mediocre quality. Liu's nephews, who accompanied him at the time, were puzzled about this. Liu Pin explained that since things were in great disarray in Dongchuan 東川 as powerful men rose up all over the fading empire, and as Mou was the son of one of the military men, his praise of Mou's works was really trying to turn a potential thug into a scholar.¹¹⁴ Although the stated purpose was consistent with aristocratic values, one may see this equally likely an act to avoid offending a potential enemy in the future.¹¹⁵

An entry in *Beimeng suoyan* notes that, "members of great clans who served in the central government were mostly unable to adapt to the changing times. They eventually behaved in their earlier [snobbish] way."¹¹⁶ Hence, even if some had first followed such advice and adopted an approachable attitude, they would find it difficult to adhere to such a mode of behavior in the long run. The dominance of the great clans over the centuries created such a powerful sense of superiority among the members that it was difficult for them to adjust to the changing of time. Perhaps the anxiety of imminent collapse caused the medieval aristocracy consciously to hold on to such an identity, and thus they found it impossible to dismantle the critical distance that set them apart from the rest of the society.

THE FADING OF THE MEDIEVAL

ARISTOCRACY DURING THE FIVE DYNASTIES PERIOD

Five Dynasties sources reveal that aristocrats continued to fill high offices in the central government; this is likely because people still believed that they possessed and monopolized specialized knowledge of

¹¹³ See, e.g., the case of Sun Wo 孫僊 (*BMSY* 4, p. 68; and *XTS* 183, p. 5386) or Liu Pin's advice against extravagance and snobbishness in his "family instructions" in *QTW* 816, pp. 8b–10b.

¹¹⁴ See *BMSY* 4, pp. 69–70.

¹¹⁵ See a similar entry in *BMSY* 4, p. 87.

¹¹⁶ This is a lost entry titled "Xue Wei qing Gaoshi" 薛韋輕高氏, preserved in *Tai ping guang ji* 太平廣記, Li Fang, comp. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986) 266, p. 2087.

government. At the same time, these sources tell us that the majority were largely incompetent. One can see this as the moment when the medieval aristocracy was on the brink of extinction.

The example of Li Zhuanmei reveals something of this critical juncture. Despite a relatively smooth career, Li was once reprimanded by emperor Mo 末 (r. 913–923) of the Latter Liang when the emperor was experiencing a problem in meeting the promise of handsome rewards for the army, a promise made when he first rose to power. He scolded Li for being unable to resolve the matter, even though Li was a member of a great clan and had bragged about his talents to others.¹¹⁷ Although the scolding was rather uncalled for, it reflects nonetheless the expectation of newly risen military leaders, of which the emperor was one, that aristocrats would bring needed administrative skills to the court. But as the sources reveal, many of them were ridiculed because of their mediocre abilities, their snobbishness, and even lack of literacy!

Doulu Ge 豆盧革 (d. 927), Lu Cheng 盧程, and Zheng Jue, for example, became chief ministers but were all disgraced for incompetence.¹¹⁸ Liu Yue 劉岳 was put in charge of revising ritual procedures in the Latter Tang, but he eventually submitted a work that was considered more vulgar than the previous ones.¹¹⁹ Cui Xie 崔協, from the smaller branch of the Qinghe clan, was rejected by Ren Huan 任圜 (d. ca. 927) for the post of chief minister because of his “illiteracy.” Because he frequently made mistakes in his writings, he received the nickname “Wuzi bei 無字碑” (Wordless Tablet).¹²⁰

The appointment of aristocrats to high positions was due to the lingering perception of the social and political functions of the great clans. This can be illustrated by the interesting case of Guo Chongtao 郭崇韜 (d. 926). Guo, a dominating figure at the court of the Latter Tang, rose to power through military merit. Sycophantic officials such as Doulu Ge talked him into believing that he was related to the famous Tang statesman Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (697–781), who played a critical role in suppressing the An Lushan Rebellion. As a result, Chongtao acted

¹¹⁷ *JWDS* 93, p. 1229. There is no direct mention that Li offered suggestions in the matter of the promise to reward the army.

¹¹⁸ Lu and Doulu served as chief ministers of the Latter Tang; see *ZZTJ* 272, p. 8882; *JWDS* 67, pp. 883–84 and 886–88. Zheng was chief minister of both the Latter Liang and Latter Tang; see *XWDS* 54, pp. 619–20.

¹¹⁹ See *XWDS* 55, pp. 631–32. Yue’s uncle, Chongwang 崇望 was a chief minister in Zhaozong’s court.

¹²⁰ See *JWDS* 58, p. 780; and *ZZTJ* 275, pp. 8998–99. According to this biog., Cui was a *jinsshi* graduate. It is noteworthy that one of the victims of the White Horse Massacre, Zhao Chong, had the same nickname because he “did not do *wenzhang*” (不為文章), likely referring to his inability to compose refined literature; see *BMSY* 3, p. 64.

as if he were an aristocrat. For example, he paid homage to Ziyi's tomb and distinguished himself from commoner colleagues at court. In deciding on employing and promoting officials, he preferred those from the great clans and rejected those of commoner background even if they were meritorious and had served long at court. For such commoners who sought promotion, Guo Chongtao would turn them down because of their low social status. He said that if he granted them promotions other aristocrats would sneer at him.¹²¹ Clearly, pedigree was still a desirable status by the late 920s.

Why, then, were scions of the great clans who served in Five Dynasties regimes largely people of lesser ability and culture? Complaints of the deplorable quality of high court officials were already heard by the end of the Tang, but became much more frequent during the Five Dynasties. The highly militaristic nature of the regimes and the predominance at that time of martial values (*wu* 武) help account, to some extent, for this development.¹²² While there was an expectation that descendants of the great clans could help to conduct the court in terms of time-honored protocols and ceremonies, they were not expected or even allowed to become involved in policy, nor were they generally trusted by the new regimes. Administrative authority was placed largely in the hands of military men such as Guo Chongtao or in those, such as Ren Huan, who began their careers as clerks in local government and became associated with the regimes early on.¹²³

A few military leaders did support and openly respect literati, but they were in the minority. Moreover, any strong preference for literati as dominant advisors could run the risk of alienating military subordinates.¹²⁴ Most of those in power during the Five Dynasties were hostile to literati. Shi Hongzhao 史弘肇, Li Bin 李邠, and Wang Zhang 王章, who dominated court politics in the Latter Han 漢 (947–950), are good examples of this attitude.¹²⁵

¹²¹ *ZZTJ* 273, p. 8915; see also *JWDS* 57, p. 772.

¹²² See Cheng-hua Fang, "Power Structures and Cultural Identities in Imperial China: Civil and Military Power from late Tang to Early Song Dynasties (A.D. 875–1063)," Ph.D. diss. (Brown University, 2001).

¹²³ See Deng Xiaonan, "Zouxiang zaizao," pp. 85–88.

¹²⁴ Only a few of the military leaders in the Five Dynasties showed interest in literary culture and patronized literati. For example, Zhang Tingyun 張廷蘊, a powerful general in the Latter Tang, was practically illiterate, but he regarded literati highly; biog. *XWDS* 47, p. 530. In the case of Li Congyan 李從曠, military governor of Fengxiang in the Latter Jin, his soldiers revolted because of his support and high regard of literati; see *ZZTJ* 281, p. 9196.

¹²⁵ For their biogs., see *JWDS* 107, pp. 1403–11. Shi Hongzhao rose through the military ranks, whereas Wang Zhang and Li Bin both began their careers as clerks. *Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜 records that Li Bin later became friendly to literati because he came to appreciate their value; cited in *JWDS* 107, p. 1409; see also Deng, "Zouxiang zaizao," p. 91.

Another way to look at the issue is to pose a simple question: “Where were the aristocrats?” Evidence suggests that many from the great clans with learning and administrative skills refused to serve in the national political scene. Ouyang Xiu lamented that the Five Dynasties period was a time “when Heaven and Earth were in decline, and the worthies hid themselves.”¹²⁶ Most renowned late-Tang literati either retired to the mountains and lived reclusive lives, or served in the governments of the Ten Kingdoms.¹²⁷ Such turning away from active engagement in politics was a natural response for worldly men who realized the great danger of a political career.

An entry in Zhao Lingshi’s 趙令時 (1064–1134) *Houqing lu* 侯鯖錄 depicts lucidly the trend of literati in the late-Tang and Five Dynasties to move away from dangerous worldly affairs. It portrays an upside-downworld in which nobles were compared less favorably to those of lower origins. Similarly, it was better to be poor than wealthy, stupid than wise, to remain idle than to take up office. The reason was because the regimes in the late-Tang and Five Dynasties were both harsh and unstable.¹²⁸ Even when some continuously tried to maintain local dominance through a variety of strategies, they no longer played any significant role in real politics at the national level.¹²⁹ Instead, much of their energy was funneled into literary and intellectual arenas,¹³⁰ and the White Horse Massacre played a role in creating such an approach to career and commitments.

¹²⁶ See *XWDS* 34, p. 369.

¹²⁷ Ample sources attest to this trend. *Shiguo chungiu* provides brief biographies of many who were scattered in these kingdoms; e.g., Du Xunhe 杜荀鶴 (846–904) and Yin Wengui 殷文圭 (fl. 904) in the Wu 吳; Jiang Wenhui 江文蔚 (fl. 940), Feng Yansi 馮延巳 (903–960), Han Xizai, and Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916–991) in the Southern Tang 南唐; Wei Zhuang, Niu Xiji 牛希濟 (ca. 872–?), and Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933) in the Former Shu 蜀; Ouyang Jiong 歐陽炯 (896–971) and Wei Gu 韋穀 in the Latter Shu; Wang Dingbao 王定保 (970–954) in the Southern Han 漢; Luo Yin and Sun He 孫郃 in Wuyue 吳越; Han Wo 韓偓 (842–923), Huang Tao, and Xu Yin 徐寅 (fl. 873) in Min 閩. Biog. of Zhang Ge 張格, e.g., notes that because of the political upheavals in the late-Tang, many literati found shelter in Shu, whose government in particular employed many from the great clans. See *SGCQ* 41, pp. 3964–65. For some descendants of famous officials in the late-Tang, such as Li Heng 李衡 (grandson of Li Deyu), who found shelter in the Lingnan 嶺南 area under the protection of the Southern Han regime, see biog. Liu Yin 劉隱, *XWDS* 65, p. 810.

¹²⁸ See *Houqing lu* in *Houqing lu, Moke huixi, Xu Moke huixi* 侯鯖錄, 墨客揮犀, 續墨客揮犀 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002) 8, p. 195.

¹²⁹ For a discussion of some of the strategies employed to maintain their dominance in local society, see Nicolas Olivier Tackett, “The Transformation of Medieval Chinese Elites (850–1000 C.E.),” Ph.D. diss. (Columbia University, 2006).

¹³⁰ Deng Xiaonan has noted the importance of intellectual discourse in local areas, citing Chao Gongwu’s 晁公武 (1105–1180?) comment on the prospering Chan movement; idem, “Zouxiang zaizao,” p. 91 n. 4.

With authority in the hands of military men and the “clerks,” it is no surprise that the recruitment process would further undercut the social and political fortunes of the great clans. Li Xiang 李詳, Secretariat Drafter in the Latter Jin, remarked on the problem in recruitment in a memorial:

During the past ten years, I have seen the court issue acts of grace frequently, offering rewards to local governments without distinction. [However], these local governments failed to follow regulations, so that they falsely represented the quality of the candidates that they recommended for government posts. They recruited easily hundreds of officials and offered them silkwear as special rewards. Therefore, lowly folks such as keepers of the storehouse keys, clerks in local offices, and even vulgar entertainers and cleaning folks were appointed respectable positions from the start. They hung silver metals and blue ribbons on their official gowns, wore purple gowns and carried ivory tablets [in their office] so that the honorable and the lowly were no longer distinguishable from each another.¹³¹

The complaint clearly lies in the confusion of what was menial and low with what was honorable. At the same time, it suggests strongly that members of the great clans had little advantage. Military and clerical skills, personal connections, and general ability were more important in securing government positions.¹³² The guideline for recommending and evaluating officials mostly stressed ability rather than pedigree.

While aristocrats still enjoyed social prestige during the first half of the Five Dynasties, sources suggest that such an advantage began to fade away after the Latter Jin.¹³³ By the Latter Zhou 周 (951–959), efforts were made to bring local recruitment back under the control of the central government. For example, in his 957 memorial on government reform, the secretariat drafter Dou Yan 竇儼 stressed the importance of appointing chief ministers and recruiting officials. His advice was to select from high ranking officials based on ability. Through the recommendations of high officials, those with talent should be given

¹³¹ “Tiaozou jiedu cishi zhousha qian zhiyuan shi shu” 條奏節度刺史州衙前職員事疏, in *QIW* 852, p. 13b. Also see *ZZTJ* 281, p. 9186. Sima Guang placed this memorial in the year 938.

¹³² Kim Jong-Seob 金宗燮 notes that re-testing of *jinshi* graduates was common during the Five Dynasties; it increased fairness in the examinations; See his “Wudai zhengju bianhua yu wenren chushi guan” 五代政局變化與文人出仕觀, in *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究 9 (2003), p. 499.

¹³³ This is based on a general reading of the two standard histories of the Five Dynasties, and Sima Guang’s *Zizhi tongjian*.

time to demonstrate their administrative skills. Then, they should be promoted in accordance with their merits.¹³⁴

The unfolding of these trends helped to accelerate the already declining fortunes of the great clans. Of particular importance were the changing dynamic of the political culture and the frequent image of incompetent aristocratic officials who represented the great clans.¹³⁵ Of course, one also has to remember the great violence unleashed at the end of the Tang in events such as the White Horse Massacre. It was within this context that the very *idea* of the aristocracy finally dissolved. However, violence alone may not be sufficient to account for the final dissolution of the deep-rooted perception of the superiority of aristocratic society.

UNDOING THE IDEA OF ARISTOCRACY: CHANGING THE SELF-ESTEEM OF THE LITERATI

By the Latter Jin, the great clans seemed to be largely uprooted. Physically, the aristocrats were adrift. Culturally, they failed to uphold the tradition and knowledge that helped to legitimize their privileged position. We no longer see them exerting much effort to defend their rights, such as Liu Pin's urging at the end of the Tang that his clansmen hold on to their rightful claim to social eminence. The hostility that they faced during the late-Tang and Five Dynasties period was to some extent the result of centuries of cultural and social inequality. Not only were they humiliated by hostile illiterate warlords, many also faced the risk of being killed by these warlords, who were known for unpredictable rages.¹³⁶ Not only were they becoming voiceless, the very idea of aristocracy began to dissolve in the midst of invalidation; one might say that it was a reawakening of those literati who had been alienated by the great clans for centuries.

Li Xiang's memorial cited in the previous section reveals a sort of "confusion" of the social order as the noble and the non-noble were

¹³⁴ See "Shang zhidao shiyi shu" 上治道事宜疏, in *QTW* 863, pp. 1a-11b; also *ZZTJ* 293, pp. 9571-72. Wang Fuzhi disagreed with Dou's recommendations; see sect. "Dou Yan lun xiang" 竇儼論相 in his *Du Tongjian lun* 30, pp. 1167-68.

¹³⁵ Other socioeconomic trends also played a role in this process. These are, however, beyond the scope of this paper. For a brief discussion of how the physical disconnection between the aristocrats and their power base had reshaped literati identity in the late-Tang, see Otagi Hajime 愛宕元, "Tōdai kōhan ni okeru shakai henshitsu no ichi kōsatsu" 唐代後半における社会変質の一考察, *THGH* 42 (1971), pp. 112-17.

¹³⁶ See examples documented in the section "Wudai muliao zhi huo" 五代幕僚之禍 in Zhao Yi 趙翼 (ed. and annot. Wang Shumin 王樹民), *Nian er shi zhaji jiaozheng* 廿二史劄記校證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984) 22, pp. 475-76.

no longer distinguishable from one another. While Li saw this as a problem of institutions, it is also important to recognize it as confusion over changing perceptions of literati identity that occurred in cultural and intellectual contexts. Such a change can be detected already at the moment of dynastic transition, just about the time of the White Horse Massacre, when we find efforts among some literati to nullify the long accepted view of the superiority of the aristocracy, and to eradicate the separation between noble families and other ones.

Luo Yin, whose contemptuous personality only brought him repeated failures in the *jinshi* examination, was well aware of the advantage held by aristocrats through social standing. He complained of this frequently in letters to court officials that solicited their patronage – letters revealing unequivocally painful awareness of his own lowly origins.¹³⁷ His work titled *Liang tong shu* 兩同書, which is analyzed following, consists of statements that come close to rejecting this sort of social separation.

Generally considered an attempt to synthesize Confucianism and Daoism, *Liang tong shu* contains ten short essays, each dwelling on a pair of opposite concepts. Through a sort of dialectical argument, Luo attempted to demonstrate that diametrically opposed concepts could be reversed. This is largely an attempt to formulate a political view, one that may be influenced by the syncretistic approach to the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) commonly found in the late-Tang and Five Dynasties.¹³⁸

It begins with the essay “Guijian” 貴賤, which rethinks the two social categories noble and commoner. From its special angle, it looks at the defining qualities of the two groups, which can be summarized as follow. In the phenomenal world, things are endowed with different *qi* 氣 (material force). Humans are the most refined among all things, yet, they need bright and sagacious ones to lead and govern them. Therefore, such ones become the rulers, and those whose talents are insuffi-

¹³⁷ See “Tou Hunan Yu changshi qi” 投湖南于常侍啓, “Tou Hunan Wang dafu qi” 投湖南王大夫啓, “Tou Yongning Li xianggong qi” 投永寧李相公啓, “Tou mijian Wei shangshu qi” 投秘監韋尚書啓, “Tou Qizhou Pei yuanwai qi” 投蘄州裴員外啓, and “Tou Tongzhou Yang shangshu qi” 投同州楊尚書啓, in *Luo Yin ji* 羅隱集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), pp. 285, 288, 289, 292, 295, 296, respectively.

¹³⁸ See Sakauchi Sakao 坂内榮夫, “Tōdai kōhan ni mieru judō itchi shisō ni tsuite, Ra In ‘Ryōdōsho’ o megutte” 唐代後半に見える儒道一致思想について, 羅隱‘兩同書’をめぐって, *Nippon Chūgoku gakkai hō* 日本中国学会報 42 (1990), pp. 141–55; Guo Wu 郭武, “Luo Yin, *Tai-ping Liangtong shu* de shehui zhengzhi sixiang” 羅隱太平兩同書的社會政治思想, *Zongjiao xue yanjiu* 宗教學研究 2006.3, pp. 10–16. See Jan De Meyer, “Confucianism and Daoism in the Political Thought of Luo Yin,” *Tang Studies* 10–11 (1992–93), p. 69.

cient to cope with the times follow their “noble” rulers. If the “nobles” are not virtuous enough, they are unfit to be called noble. Similarly, for those of humble background, if they cultivate the way (*dao* 道), they are no longer lowly (that is common, less than noble). Therefore, noble and common switch places, and one’s fortune and social standing have no role in determining such status, for “nobility” is measured by one’s character, learning, talent, and ability.¹³⁹

Conscious about both his lowly origins and failed political ambitions, Luo likely formulated such views for self-consolation. His advice on proper government by recruiting capable officials suggests his disapproval of aristocrats. He was challenging the rigidity of the system, but he did not negate the possibility of there being a noble status among the ruling elite. What he did was to offer a different way to look at the notions of “noble” and “commoner.” Furthermore, his was not a lone voice. At around the same time, other works, such as *Hua shu* 化書 and *Wuneng zi* 無能子, articulated a similar opinion in rejecting, or at least questioning, the dichotomy.¹⁴⁰ They not only rejected the relevance of the great clans in the new social and political reality, but also provided indications of a change in thinking.

While these works merely hint at a dissolution of the *great divide*, a more direct and sober voice was articulated by Niu Xiji 牛希濟 (ca. 872–?), likely around the time of the White Horse Massacre.¹⁴¹ Niu rose to the post of Hanlin 翰林 academician in the Shu kingdom (908–918) and served at the court of Latter Tang when it conquered the Shu.¹⁴² He is known particularly for his *ci* 詞 poems, some of which are represented in the Five Dynasties collection *Huajian ji* 花間集.¹⁴³ What con-

¹³⁹ See *Luo Yin ji*, p. 261.

¹⁴⁰ For some studies of these works, see Liu Yonghai 劉永海, “Qianyi *Hua shu* zhong ‘yiqie jie hua’ de sixiang” 淺議化書中‘一切皆化’的思想, *Tangshan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 唐山師範學院學報 23.4 (2001), pp. 53–56; Zhao Jianhua 趙建華, “*Wuneng zi* de shehui zhengzhi sixiang” 無能子的社會政治思想, *Shehui kexue yanjiu* 社會科學研究 2001.4, pp. 81–84.

¹⁴¹ Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 has provided insights into the process of the late-Tang transformation of literati culture. However, because of the complexities of the overall situation, some of his brief remarks require more careful assessment; see idem, *Tangdai zhengzhi shi shulun gao* 唐代政治史述論稿 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1956), p. 92.

¹⁴² Niu’s biog., *SGCQ* 44, p. 4000, provides little on family background and dates. He was a nephew of another Five Dynasties poet Niu Qiao 牛嶠, whose own biog. claims descent from Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 (779–847), who, in turn, traced his ancestry to the Sui 隋-era official Niu Hong 牛弘 (545–610). However, Sengru’s relation to Hong is likely fictitious; see Chen, *Tangdai zhengzhi shi*, pp. 89–90. Even if this were true, Hong was not from a prominent clan. His family name was Liao 寮, and it was only because of his father’s political merits that they were bestowed the surname Niu by the Northern Wei 魏 (386–534) regime. See Niu Hong biog. in Wei Zheng 魏徵 and Linghu Defeng 令狐德棻, comps., *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982) 40, p. 1297. It is therefore unlikely that Niu Xiji came from a prominent clan.

¹⁴³ For a recent study of this collection, see Anna Shields, *Crafting a Collection: The Cul-*

cerns us in the present discussion are his essays on government. The essay “Hansu lun” 寒素論 is an interesting statement,¹⁴⁴ which helps to contextualize the imminent collapse of medieval aristocracy as an *idea* in the early-tenth century.¹⁴⁵ Niu begins by making explicit the point that it was one’s ability, not pedigree, which qualified his leading position in society:

Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 rose up from the fields, and ruled the world because of their virtues of humanity and righteousness... How could this be related to their high or lowly positions [in society]? If one acted humanely and righteously, then one became a gentleman. If one failed to act humanely and righteously, then one became a small man. How could this be related to one’s inheritance from the high positions of his ancestors? Carriages with cattail around the wheels were not dispatched to the residences of feudal lords,¹⁴⁶ and invitation gifts were not sent to [those already serving] at court. [They were sent to those who] were all recluses retired to mountains and caves, who could carry out [virtuous policies] of humanity and righteousness. Their virtue of transformation reached local areas and was heard in both local governments and the court. [The state] then sought them out for service after [learning of their virtues and ability]. Why must they be sons of high officials?¹⁴⁷

From here, Niu proceeded to examples of historical figures of lowly social origins who rose to ruling positions because of virtue and

tural Contexts and Poetic Practice of the Huajian ji: Collection from among the Flowers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

¹⁴⁴ The notion “hansu” refers to those of modest or even obscure background during the Tang. However, it, or variants like “han shi” 寒士 or “suzu” 素族, connote a relatively more elevated social and political standing during the Period of Disunion. See the notes on these terms in Tang Changru 唐長孺, *Wei-Jin Nanbei chao shilun shiyi* 魏晉南北朝史論拾遺 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), pp. 249–57.

¹⁴⁵ Wang Yunxi 王運熙 and Yang Ming 楊明 have noted that Niu’s essays were written at the end of Tang; see their *Zhongguo wenxue piping tongshi: Sui-Tang Wudai juan* 中國文學批評通史, 隋唐五代卷 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1996), pp. 615–16. Internal evidence from other essays by Niu in *Quan Tang wen* and other Five Dynasties’ sources seem to support this; e.g., in “Biaozhang lun” 表章論 (QIW 845, p. 7b), Niu referred to famous examples of memorials written by renowned officials since the Yuanhe 元和 (805–820) period of “our dynasty 國朝.” Similarly, in criticizing the appointment of eunuchs to office, he complained that since Xuanzong’s Tianbao and Kaiyuan 開元 (713–741) reigns of “our state” (*guojia* 國家), the court appointed no less than ten thousand eunuchs; see “Zhi lun” 治論 in QIW 845, p. 11a.

¹⁴⁶ “Pulun” 蒲輪 is an allusion to the Annals of Emperor Wudi 武帝 (156–87 BCE) of the Han, when the state tried to invite Shen gong 申公 of Lu 魯 to serve the government. They wrapped cattail around the wheels of the carriage in order to reduce the vibration as a way to show their respect and seriousness in getting the service of a virtuous official; *Han shu* 6, p. 157.

¹⁴⁷ QIW 846, pp. 15b–16a.

talent. They either excelled in Confucian scholarship, for example, Zheng Kangcheng 鄭康成 (127–200), or were renowned for their virtuous characters, pointing out Huang Sudu 黃叔度 (ca. 75–ca. 122).¹⁴⁸ The thrust of Luo's essay is that one could improve his social standing by his own efforts. Moreover, one should not underestimate his own potential nor be intimidated by snobbish aristocrats.

Based on the tone of the essay, another intended audience consisted of literati of humble background; and the intent is plain – motivate them to participate in politics, and “emancipate” them from the constraints of a rigid society dominated by the great clans. This can be achieved by changing the way they looked at themselves:

Now, for those who came from aristocratic families with ranks and official caps, they treated those from ordinary families as servants and serfs. [They believed that they could order them around] as easy as picking up grass from the ground. [Thus], they do not consider them as equals. For those who came from ordinary families, [even if they were able to] elevate themselves by their virtue and learning, they would still treat [those from the great clans] the way that they would revere statesmen, and keep distance from them like running away from ferocious animals. This is because they do not understand their [own worth]. Who were Yao and Shun? One after the other they carried forward the Way. Who are these aristocrats, and who am I? [This is all because] we lack self-respect! There are those who were ordinary folks in the morning but rose to the position of ministers at dawn, and there are those who were local lords but became hungry ghosts in the evening. It is up to us in upholding or abandoning the Way... The most virtuous of the literati are not [necessarily] sons of aristocrats. Yet, they ascended to ministerial posts. Even the fisherman and the cart driver can become the teachers and ministers of kings. Why should a scholar of humble background disesteem himself 豈白屋之士, 可以自遺之哉?¹⁴⁹

This is a powerful statement that reads more like a sermon, and the message is clear. It promotes a sense of self-respect, one that is anchored

¹⁴⁸ Kangcheng was the style name of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, a famous classicist; his biog. in *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 states that he worked as a local government clerk when young and later entered the Imperial Academy to study the classics; see Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973) 35, p. 1207. Shudu is the style name of Huang Xian 黃憲, who came from a poor family, his father being an animal doctor. Xian was considered virtuous, and scholars and high officials who met him all recognized his superior quality; biog. *Hou Han shu* 53, pp. 1744–45.

¹⁴⁹ *QTW* 846, pp. 16a–16b.

to an “egalitarian” vision that literati of modest background were just as qualified as aristocrats in their claim to leadership. Such a message is consistently echoed in Niu’s other essays. For example, “Jianshi lun” 薦士論 argues that a major problem in recruitment during his day was that local officials, in recommending worthy scholars to the central government, only selected those from the great clans and paid no attention to talent and ability.¹⁵⁰ A similar attack on the incompetence of aristocrats is expressed in the essay “Gongshi lun” 貢士論.¹⁵¹

Moreover, the point on the unpredictable fates of high court officials as seen in the above passage is surprisingly familiar. It seems to echo the traumatic experience of many literati who “witnessed” the White Horse Massacre. While there is no clear evidence to confirm this, and there is no need to press for such a connection, Niu, like many literati, was undoubtedly familiar with the demise of court officials from the great clans at the end of the Tang. Seen in the broader context of late-Tang and Five Dynasties social and political upheavals, Niu’s message reveals unmistakably the intricate transformation of literati discourse at the moment of dynastic transition.

The desire to dissolve the difference between the pure and the muddy was evident. However, it was not that between the civil and martial segments of the ruling elite, or that between literati and clerks. Li Zhen’s desire to equate the pure and the muddy by polluting the pure did not bridge the gap between the two. The dichotomy between them was a demarcating line drawn within the literati community. While the violence unleashed by the military elite did significantly shape literati discourse, the dissolution of the demarcating line was also fueled by intrinsic forces generated from within the literati community itself, in particular the examination discourse. It brought the pure and muddy closer together, and allows us to see how literati were “awakened” by the political, social, and cultural upheavals of the dynastic transition. In this process of awakening, pure and muddy within the literati community finally dissolved.¹⁵²

A general impression we get upon examining Five Dynasties sources is that there were no other similarly strong statements such as those articulated by Niu during the period. This may be explained

¹⁵⁰ “名邦劇邑，諸侯之薦士，宰執之命官，豈唯平生未交於一言，蓋見其姓氏而已，豈能據實哉？” *QTW* 846, pp. 11b–12a.

¹⁵¹ “...目雖行此，擢第又不由於文藝矣。唯王公子弟，器貌奇偉，無才無藝者，亦冠於多士之首，” *QTW* 846, pp. 14a–b.

¹⁵² How aristocratic mentality dissolved and the *shift* in literati attitude unfolded during the Five Dynasties are beyond the present scope, and deserve a separate study.

by the fact that the dissolution of medieval aristocracy was well under way, and the aristocrats no longer presented to other literati the kinds of threat that they posed in the late-Tang. They were no longer significant.

By Song times, literati culture had greatly transformed. While many literati still remembered the dominance of the great clans during the Tang, it was no longer relevant to their lives, as Zhao Yanwei 趙彥衛 (ca. 1140–ca. 1210) in the Southern Song (1127–1279) observed: “Tang people considered the Cuis and the Lus as the top-ranked families,... These days, we no longer pay attention to the issue of pedigree... .”¹⁵³

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BMSY</i>	<i>Beimeng suoyan</i> 北夢瑣言
<i>DKJKBZ</i>	<i>Dengke ji kao buzheng</i> 登科記考補正
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Jiu Tang shu</i> 舊唐書
<i>JWDS</i>	<i>Jiu Wudai shi</i> 舊五代史
<i>QIW</i>	<i>Quan Tang wen</i> 全唐文
<i>SGCQ</i>	<i>Shiguo chungiu</i> 十國春秋
<i>XTS</i>	<i>Xin Tang shu</i> 新唐書
<i>XWDS</i>	<i>Xin Wudai shi</i> 新五代史
<i>ZZTJ</i>	<i>Zizhi tongjian</i> 資治通鑑

¹⁵³ “唐人推崔、盧等姓爲甲族，...今人不復以氏族爲事...”; see his *Yunlu manchao* 雲麓漫鈔 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996) 3, p. 51.

