

Ideas concerning Diplomacy and Foreign Policy under the Tang Emperors Gaozu and Taizong

In 617, the duke of Tang Li Yuan 李淵, a general stationed in Taiyuan 太原 (present-day Shanxi province), staged a mutiny against the Sui court (581–617). This event eventually led to the establishment of the Tang dynasty one year later in 618. In his efforts to build a new regime, Li Yuan faced fierce competition from rebel leaders in northern China and a possible threat by the Eastern Turks, then the overlords of the northern steppe.¹ In managing relations with both his Chinese competitors and the Turkish ruler, Li Yuan acted on the principles of *de* 德 and *yi* 義, terms that have been conventionally translated as “virtue” and “righteousness,” respectively. In reality, however, Tang foreign policy rested not on these abstract moral principles, which mainly signify personal moral cultivation and conduct. In the context of Tang diplomacy, *de* and *yi* possessed multiple connotations. The former word could mean “getting a proper arrangement in affairs 得事宜,” and the latter word could indicate “appropriateness 宜” in an intended foreign policy. Both terms involved shrewd calculation of one’s own strength relative to that of competitors and enemies, careful examination of the timing for the action to be taken, and due consideration for the possible outcomes of the action. As pragmatic and utilitarian principles for undertaking events, they emphasized efficacy, expedience, and mutual self-interest. They were largely free of the Confucian moral constraints often discussed under the rubrics of trustworthiness, righteousness, and loyalty. Li Yuan’s diplomatic thinking was much concerned with *de* and *yi*, and as such it strongly influenced future Tang emperors.

¹ Du You 杜佑, *Tong dian* 通典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984; hereafter cited as *TD*) 197, p. 1069; Liu Xu 劉煦 et al., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975; hereafter cited as *JTS*) 194A, p. 5153; Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁, *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975; hereafter, *XTS*) 215A, p. 6028; Wang Pu 王溥, *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1936; hereafter, *THY*) 94, p. 1687.

BECOMING A VASSAL OF THE QAGHAN:
LI YUAN'S DEALINGS WITH THE TURKS

Unlike other Chinese rebel leaders of the 610s, Li Yuan was a man of prudence and experience in politics: taking actions appropriate to the times was integral to his thinking. When wide-spread rebellions broke out at the end of the Sui, Li Yuan acted with caution.² He refrained from hastily assuming an openly anti-Sui stance, which would prematurely disclose his real intentions and result in hostility from the Sui court and from his competitors. Although his subordinates and visitors urged him several times to act against the Sui court, he listened to them patiently, rewarded them generously, but refused openly to endorse and act on their suggestions.³ Li Yuan was tight-lipped about his intentions even to his own son, Shimin 世民, who had offered him a carefully conceived plan for mutiny. "I pondered your words last night," said he, "they are quite reasonable." Short of endorsing the plan, Li Yuan then told his son: "You are the one who will either bring total destruction to our family, or transform this family into [one that will head] a [new] empire."⁴

The duke of Tang was equally tactful when dealing with the rebel leaders and the Turks.⁵ Li Yuan's base in Taiyuan was sandwiched between the Turks and various hostile domestic forces. The city was vulnerable to a joint attack. Gaining peace with the Turks in order to secure Taiyuan thus became Li Yuan's top priority.⁶ He decided to seek assistance from the Turks, hoping that the Turkic leader, Shibi 始畢 qaghan (r. 609–18), would guarantee Taiyuan a degree of protection.⁷ Li Yuan soon sent a carefully crafted personal letter by envoy to Shibi. To ensure that the Turkic ruler would accept the letter, Li Yuan used the humble expression "[Li Yuan] writes (*qi* 啓)" as the opening sentence. His subordinates suggested revision of the self-degrading verb *qi* to a

² Zhao Rui 趙蕤, *Changduan jing* 長短經 (SKQS edn.) 7, p. 37b.

³ *JTS* 58, p. 2305.

⁴ Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956; hereafter, *ZZTJ*) 183, pp. 5730–31.

⁵ See Li Yuan's letter to Li Mi 李泌, a separatist leader active in areas near Loyang 洛陽, in Wen Daya 溫大雅, *Da Tang chuanyue qijuzhu* 大唐創業起居注 (SKQS edn.; hereafter, *Wen Daya*) B, pp. 10a–b.

⁶ Ibid A, pp. 3a–b. Howard J. Wechsler, "The Founding of the T'ang Dynasty: Kao-tzu (reign 618–26)," in *Sui and Tang China 589–906*, vol. 3, part 1 of *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1979), pp. 181–82.

⁷ Xie Baocheng 謝保成, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao* 貞觀政要集校 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), p. 70; Liu Su 劉餗, *Da Tang xinyu* 大唐新語 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1984), p. 106; *JTS* 67, p. 2480; *XTS* 215A, p. 6035.

less status-sensitive term, *shu* 書, since the former was often employed in communications from a subject to the emperor. Li Yuan laughed at their suggestion, saying: “How come you do not understand the situation at all? Since [the Sui] is reduced to chaos, many [Chinese] have fled [China]; and many scholars have joined the barbarians in the north and south. The barbarians now perfectly understand Chinese ceremonies. They may not trust me even if I show respect for them in this letter. It will certainly deepen their suspicion if my letter shows any signs of disrespect. As an old saying goes: [A great man] knows when to yield to one person, and when not to tens of thousands of people. Do not treat the barbarians as common and unenlightened men. ... Moreover, the term in question is not worth 1,000 pieces of gold. I would even have presented [the Turks] with 1,000 pieces of gold. Why should I begrudge using that term [in my letter]? This is something you have not thought about.”⁸

This correspondence of Li Yuan gave no hint of his ambition to establish a new empire. It rather justified his action on the ground of saving ordinary people, restoring power to the Sui court, and resuming amicable ties between the two countries. The letter then proposed to the Turkish ruler: “If [you send soldiers to] follow me, and if they do not harm common people, such spoils from my expeditions as prisoners of war, women, jade, and silks will all belong to you. Should you think China is too far away [for your soldiers] to penetrate, but instead allow friendship and communication [between us], you will still receive treasures without fighting a single battle. Qaghan, you may act at your convenience, weighing the situation and deciding [what is most] appropriate [for you].”⁹ Li Yuan thus offered Shibi a deal: Chinese treasures in exchange for direct but minimal Turkish military assistance, or for a Turkish commitment to non-interference apropos any future operations.

This proposal received a mixed response from the Turks. Although pleased with the promised Chinese valuables, they also demanded Li Yuan’s recognition of Turkish suzerainty. As the overlord of north Asia, the Turks considered Li Yuan one of those Chinese separatist leaders who must enter a lord-vassal relationship before receiving any help.¹⁰ Li Yuan’s envoy returned home with an oral message and a letter from Shibi. Li Yuan’s negative reactions after reading the letter indicate that

⁸ *Wen Daya* A, pp. 12a–13a.

⁹ *Ibid.* A, pp. 11a–b; *JTS* 57, p. 2290; and *ZZTJ* 184, pp. 5737–38.

¹⁰ *Wen Daya* A, p. 12b.

Shibi must have demanded that Li Yuan accept a Turkish title and a banner. Annoyed, Li Yuan told his advisors: "I would rather not seek their friendship if doing so means to accept their demand."¹¹ But his practical-minded son, Shimin, evidently thought otherwise.

To Shimin, accepting a Turkish title in exchange for Turkish support was an expedient action. Since some of his contemporaries had already done so,¹² Shimin saw no valid reason for his father not to follow suit. Entering a lord-vassal relationship with the Turks was, after all, a necessary action that did not equate with accepting a permanent subordinate position. In this relationship, military strength alone determined the parties' status relative to each other; instability was thus its prominent feature. Any change in the strength of one party could tip the balance of power between the agreement's parties in a different direction.¹³ Shimin pressed his father to satisfy the Turkish demand. He instructed Pei Ji 裴寂 and Liu Wenjing 劉文靜, his two major advisors, to master-mind an incident, during which Shimin's soldiers stationed at the Xingguo Temple 興國寺 would threaten a mutiny should Li Yuan refuse the Turks' demand.¹⁴ Citing the "pressing situation" as the reason, the circumspect Li Yuan eventually adopted, in the sixth month of 617, Shimin's plan: "Changing the banners to show the Turks [the new stance of Li Yuan]" and "associating with the Turks to strengthen [Li Yuan's] forces."¹⁵

A banner of a specific color served as a material statement of its holder's political affiliation. As a subject of the Sui, Li Yuan had been using banners in crimson, the official color of the Sui.¹⁶ After conducting a divination, he decided upon white to symbolize an intention to establish his own dynasty. This was no coincidence. Some of Li Yuan's influential advisors were Daoist priests who had discussed the cosmo-

¹¹ Ibid A, pp. 12b-13a.

¹² Wei Zheng 魏徵, *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973) 4, p. 89; *JTS* 54, pp. 2234-43; 55, pp. 2245-48, pp. 2251-57; 56, pp. 2280-83; 57, pp. 2301-2; *XTS* 85, pp. 3696-703; 86, pp. 3705-8, pp. 3711-15; 87, pp. 3730-32; 88, pp. 3745-46; 92, p. 3804; 215A, pp. 6028-29. See also Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, "Lun Tang Gaozu chengchen Tujue shi" 論唐高祖稱臣於突厥事, in his *Hanliu tang ji* 寒柳堂集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe), pp. 97-99.

¹³ Wu Yugui 吳玉貴, *Tujue hanguo yu Sui Tang guanxi shi yanjiu* 突厥汗國與隋唐關係史研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998), p. 150.

¹⁴ *Wen Daya* A, pp. 13a-b; Wang Qinruo 王欽若, *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1960; hereafter, *CFY*) 7, p. 6b; and *ZZTJ* 184, p. 5738.

¹⁵ *JTS* 57, p. 2292; *Wen Daya* A, pp. 13b-14a. Here and subsequently, I use the term "month" specifically to refer to traditional Chinese lunar months, whose ordered numbering (e.g., first mo., second mo., etc.) within any Chinese imperial reign-year falls generally about 5-6 weeks behind the ordering of Western months. Thus, we can think of the event of 617, "sixth month," as in early- to mid-July (the West's seventh).

¹⁶ *Sui shu* 1, p. 15.

logical importance of white. Of further importance was that white was the preferred color of the Turkish elite, who happened to worshiped Laozi 老子.¹⁷ They would regard a person holding a white banner as one of their own. Using white banners, Li Yuan cleverly displayed both his intention to create a dynastic change and to indicate his symbolic submission to the Turks. After weighing the situation, he also decided that at this early stage of his operation he should disguise his real ambition to overthrow the Sui. He therefore ordered his troops to use both crimson and white banners, thus deliberately sending misleading signals both to the Sui court and the Turkish leaders.¹⁸

Delighted at Li Yuan's response, Shibi dispatched two ranking officials to Taiyuan to deliver a letter that conferred upon Li Yuan a Turkish title. During the ceremonial expected of a subject, Li Yuan respectfully accepted the letter, and generously rewarded the Turkish diplomats.¹⁹ This move was one of "strategic ambiguity" that served Li Yuan's best interest at the moment: it avoided a statement of disloyalty to either Sui nor Turk, while at the same time misled both to believe that he had, at least partially, given each his loyalty. This was indeed a move that demonstrated Li Yuan's considerable political wisdom.²⁰ It made perfect sense at the time, but would become too embarrassing an event for future Tang historians to openly admit in their works.

Li Yuan then marched his troops southwest toward Huoyi 霍邑 (present-day Huoxian, Shanxi province), where they won a major battle over a Sui elite force. They proceeded to Longmen 龍門 (present-day Hejian, Shanxi province), a town on the eastern bank of the Yellow River that was only some 100 kilometers east of the Sui capital. In the ninth month of 617, Li Yuan and his followers crossed the Yellow River.²¹ The Sui capital was now within Li Yuan's grasp. However, Xue

¹⁷ Kangqiaoli 康鞘利, the Turkish envoy who would soon visit Li Yuan, was one example. During his stay in Taiyuan, he lodged at the Xingguo Daoist Temple. He would bow to the image of Laozi every time he passed by the hall of worship. See *Wen Daya A*, p. 18a. See also Kegasawa Yasunori 氣賀澤保規, "Dai Tō sōgyō kikyochū no seikaku tokuden" 大唐創業起居注の性格特點, *Ōryō shigaku* 鷹陵史學 8 (1982), pp. 64–70. Circumstantial evidence in primary sources seems to support the argument that Daoism had spread out of Tang China; *JTS* 198, p. 5308.

¹⁸ *Wen Daya B*, p. 14a-b; Zhao, *Changduan jing* 7, p. 38b.

¹⁹ *Wen Daya A*, p. 18a.

²⁰ Whether Li Yuan decided to become a Turkish vassal has been a controversial issue among scholars. While the answer of Chen Yinke and Xue Zongzheng 薛宗正 is positive, Li Shutong 李樹桐 and Niu Zhigong 牛致功 have disagreed with them. See Chen Yinke, "Lun Tang Gaozu chengchen Tujue shi," in his *Hanliu tang ji*, pp. 97–100; Xue Zongzheng, *Tujue shi* 突厥史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1992), pp. 203–5; Li Shutong, "Tang Gaozu chengchen yu Tujue kaobian" 唐高祖稱臣於突厥攷辨, in his *Tangshi kaobian* 唐史攷辨 (Taibei: Taiwan zhonghua shuju, 1965), p. 240; and Niu Zhigong, *Tang Gaozu zhuan* 唐高祖傳 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1998), pp. 25–26.

²¹ *JTS* 58, p. 2315; and *XTS* 83, pp. 3642–43.

Ju 薛舉, another separatist leader who had earlier established his own regime, the Western Qin in Jincheng 金城 (northwest of present-day Lanzhou, Gansu province), was also closing in on the Sui capital from a different direction. A fatal clash was inevitable, the outcome of which would determine whether Li Yuan could maintain his control of the capital region, or be forced to retreat to Taiyuan.

At the beginning of 618, Tang forces managed to beat back Xue Ju's onslaught at Fufeng 扶風 (present-day Xingping, Shaanxi province), about 100 kilometers west of the capital. To regain the initiative, Xue Ju linked up with the Turks and Liang Shidu 梁師都, a separatist leader active in northeastern Inner Mongolia, the three parties agreeing to a joint attack on the capital.²² This plan, however, never materialized as the situation took an unexpected turn against Xue Ju: during an engagement at Qianshuiyuan 淺水原 (present-day Changwu, Shaanxi province, about 150 kilometers northwest of the capital) in the eleventh month, Tang forces defeated the Western Qin forces, and thus secured, for the first time, a base in northwestern China.

Traditional historians attributed this strategic victory at Qianshuiyuan solely to Li Shimin and his military leadership.²³ In fact, it was diplomacy and bribery, not ingenious military strategy on the battlefield, that decisively turned the tide in Li Shimin's favor. When war started in the early months of 618, Shimin and other Tang generals suffered humiliating setbacks at the hands of Xue Ju, whose troops outnumbered the Tang forces by almost three to one. Shimin lost half of his forces and was forced back to the Sui capital. At this crucial point, Li Yuan hurriedly sent Yuwen Xin 宇文歆 as his envoy to visit Moheduoshe 莫賀咄設, the future Xieli 頡利 qaghan (Illig qaghan, r. 620–630). After receiving a large amount of valuables and silks as bribes from the Tang envoy and a promise that Tang would allow direct Turkish control of Wuyuan (the administrative center of which is in present-day Linhe, Inner Mongolia) and Yulin prefectures (the administrative center of which is in present-day Shier Liancheng, Inner Mongolia), the Turkish leader decided to switch sides. Instead of keeping his promise to send soldiers to support Xue Ju on the mutually agreed date, he dispatched them to fight alongside Li Shimin at Qianshuiyuan.²⁴ The betrayal of the Turks decidedly changed the balance of power between Li Shimin

²² *JTS* 55, p. 2246.

²³ *ZZTJ* 186, p. 5822; and *XTS* 86, p. 3708.

²⁴ *JTS* 55, p. 2247; 194A, p. 5155; *XTS* 215A, p. 6029; and *ZZTJ* 185, pp. 5786–87.

and Xue Ju. The fate of Xu Ju and his Western Qin was doomed even before the battle at Qianshuiyuan actually started.²⁵

BRIBING FOREIGN FOES FOR PEACE

Throughout 618, Tang forces proceeded to bring southwestern and eastern China under control. At the beginning of 619, Tang had extended its territories into areas of Gansu and Qinghai provinces in the northwest, Sichuan province in the south, and almost the whole Hubei and Henan provinces in the east. China was moving toward political unification under the Tang. But the balance of power between China and the Eastern Turks remained in favor of the latter for more than another decade. During this time the Tang court was preoccupied with the arduous task of subduing the separatist regimes controlling important regions of China, and establishing domestic order. This was the domestic and external context in which Li Yuan, now Gaozu 高祖, the first emperor of the Tang dynasty, had an edict promulgated in 619:

I have reverently received the heavenly task of pacifying and governing people to the ends of the universe. I shall please people nearby, attract those from far, and correct the shortcomings of the previous dynasty. When countries in inaccessible lands submit themselves to and offer to become barrier kingdoms for China, we should harmonize and befriend them. Now the Tuyuhun 吐谷渾 tribe has paid tribute, and Koguryō 高句麗 has also offered loyalty to us; people from remote places far beyond our borders have all asked to submit themselves to us. It is therefore timely and appropriate to pacify them. I shall dispatch envoys to announce my intention to maintain friendly relations with neighboring countries. That is the way to end border conflicts and to calm my people. This should be made known to the world so that everybody understands my intention.²⁶

This edict should not be understood as a revelation of Gaozu's intention to become a universal king, or to make Tang a suzerain that had substantial overlord-vassal relations with its neighbors. The opposite, in fact, was the case. As yet, Gaozu controlled but a small part of China. He was far from a universal king. The Tuyuhun during the early-Tang, for example, was not a tribute-paying tribe to China, but a source of support for Gaozu, whose envoy had approached Tuyuhun

²⁵ For discussions of this diplomatic maneuver, see Wu, *Tujue hanguo*, pp. 154–61.

²⁶ Song Minqiu 宋敏求, *Tang dazhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1959; hereafter, *TDZLJ*) 128, p. 632; *CFYG* 170, p. 2050; Luo Guowei 羅國威, *Ricang hongren ben wenguan cilin jiaozheng* 日藏弘仁本文館詞林校證 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2001), p. 246.

for an alliance against Li Gui 李軌, leader of an anti-Tang force.²⁷ In fact, border conflict was the norm of bilateral relations during Gaozu's time, with the Tuyuhun taking the offensive in 622, 623, 624, and 626. In 624 alone, the Tang borders were attacked five times.²⁸ Gaozu's major concern was to secure China's borders so that he could concentrate on eliminating domestic rebel forces. This concern prompted him to improve relations with the three Korean states, Silla 新羅, Paekche 百濟 and Koguryō, the last of which had been the target of repeated attempts at conquest by the Sui dynasty.²⁹ Securing China's borders was to become central in the thinking of successive Tang emperors. This concern itself posed the challenging task for Gaozu and his successors: how to balance the contradicting demands of operating an open international system while in the meantime keeping effective control of China's borders. And what would be the appropriate foreign policy that could orient itself towards neither excessive expansiveness nor closure?

The Turkish leaders understood that an unstable domestic situation left the Tang vulnerable to external threats. And they acted to exploit a weakened China. In the second month of 619, Shibi arrived at Xiazhou 夏州 (present-day Baichengzi, Inner Mongolia), where he allocated 500 Turkish cavalymen to Liu Wuzhou 劉武周, a separatist leader, and ordered him to attack Taiyuan. In the same month, however, Shibi died, and the relations between Liu and the Turks started to deteriorate. But he proceeded with the plan to attack Taiyuan. In the initial phase of his campaign from the fourth to the sixth months, Liu was still able to solicit Turkish support. When he encamped his troops at the Huangshe Mountain 黃蛇嶺 (located north of present-day Yuci, Shanxi province), he had Turkish soldiers under his command.³⁰ Having sacked several towns east and southwest of Taiyuan, his troops isolated the city. Taiyuan fell in the ninth month, and Liu's troops moved to exploit their victory, seizing more cities east of the Yellow River. The situation was now very serious: Liu Wuzhou could cross the river and threaten Chang'an. To consolidate the defense of the capital, Li Yuan even contemplated, but eventually abandoned, the idea of giving

²⁷ The two sides made a deal: Gaozu promised to release the former Tuyuhun chieftain who had fled from the Sui capital and was staying in the Tang capital, Chang'an 長安, and in return the Tuyuhun agreed to engage Li Kuei's force. A Tuyuhun envoy soon arrived in Chang'an, not to pay tribute but to urge the Tang court to fulfill its promise. *ZZTJ* 187, p. 5841.

²⁸ *ZZTJ* 190, p. 5951, p. 5953, pp. 5966-67, p. 5969, p. 5982; 191, p. 5984, p. 5988, p. 5991, pp. 5993-94, pp. 5998-6000.

²⁹ In 622 he reiterated his goodwill in an edict to the king of Koguryō: "How splendid it would be if both China and Koguryō could maintain their territorial integrity." See *JTS* 199A, pp. 5320-21; *CFYG* 170, p. 10a.

³⁰ *JTS* 55, p. 2253; *XTS* 86, p. 3712; and *ZZTJ* 187, p. 5850.

up the lost cities. However, even as victory seemed to be within Liu Wuzhou's grasp, his offensive began to crumble as fast as it had gained momentum. In the tenth month, Li Shimin's forces crossed the Yellow River to forestall any further westward advancement of Liu's troops. In the fourth month of 620, Li Shimin pursued and defeated an enemy force that was retreating due to a lack of provisions. Liu Wuzhou then abandoned Taiyuan without staging a fight, and fled with only 100 cavalymen back to the Turkish headquarters.

No detailed accounts of this dramatic development have survived in primary sources. But we read that when Li Yuan recaptured Taiyuan, he came with not just his own troops, but also 2,000 Turkish horsemen.³¹ This indicates that the Turks changed sides during Liu Wuzhou's campaign against Tang, from providing Liu with horses and soldiers, to discarding him, and eventually siding with Li Shimin. It seems that only a break-up between Liu and his Turkish lord and a deal between Tang and the Turks could have led to Liu's fiasco. The tragic death of Liu and his general Song Jin'gang 宋金剛 was clear evidence of the break-up in question: both of them were executed by their own Turkish master.³² As for the deal between Tang and the Turks, circumstantial evidence points to the fact that Tang forces, instead of assuming control of Liu's territories, handed such control over to the Turks.³³

The Liu Wuzhou incident and the subsequent Tang efforts to unify China reduced the viability of Chinese separatist forces, which were unable to participate further as principal forces in attacking the Tang. The Turks now had to mount military operations against China alone. With this development, the nominal lord-vassal relationship between the Tang and the Turks evolved into one of open confrontation.³⁴ An abortive Turkish operation scheduled in 620 was an indication of this new relationship.

The New Situation among the Turks after Chuluo's Death

The Chuluo qaghan decided to personally lead this operation after an envoy of Liang Shidu had convinced him of the necessity of the move.³⁵ Acting on the envoy's advice, Chuluo started to organize an operation of massive scale. With cooperation by Liang Shidu, Dou

³¹ *JTS* 194A, p. 5154; *ZZTJ* 188, p. 5884; and *CFYG* 973, p. 10b.

³² *JTS* 1, p. 11; 55, p. 2254; *XTS* 1, p. 14; and *ZZTJ* 188, pp. 5882–83.

³³ *XTS* 215A, p. 6029; *CFYG* 990, p. 20b; and *ZZTJ* 188, p. 5885. See also Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 and Zhao Chao 趙超, *Tangdai muzhiming huibian xujì* 唐代墓誌銘彙編續集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2001), p. 493.

³⁴ *JTS* 56, p. 2282; *XTS* 92, p. 3804; and *ZZTJ* 188, pp. 5894–95.

³⁵ *JTS* 56, p. 2280; *XTS* 87, p. 3731; and *ZZTJ* 188, p. 5895.

Jiande 竇建德, and tribesmen from Xi 奚, Xii 霫 (a tribe active north of Xilamulun River, Inner Mogolia), Kitan 契丹, and Malgal 靺鞨, four Turkish leaders would command their cavalrymen to attack the Tang from different directions. And the final target of the operation was the Tang capital, Chang'an.³⁶ The whole plan, however, abruptly ended when Chuluo suffered an attack of rheumatism and died a mysterious death in the eleventh month of 620.³⁷

Chuluo's death was a watershed in Turkish policy toward China. His successors abandoned his ambition to establish a regime in China. From the 620s onward, Turkish hostilities toward China continued; but they now aimed primarily at extracting valuables from the Tang court. This policy change on the Turkish part enabled the Tang to successfully implement its policy of "bribery for peace." Moreover, the Turks also started to lose their strategic advantage over the Tang in areas east of the Yellow River loop when the local Chinese leader at Yanmen 雁門 submitted himself to the Tang court. About 180 kilometers northeast of Taiyuan, Yanmen had been a springboard for the Turks to raid China. When Hu Daen 胡大恩 offered his loyalty to the Tang in 621, however, Yanmen became a protective screen for Taiyuan, a buffer zone between the Tang and the Turks, and, in the future, a jumping off point from which the Tang could strike the Turks. Two years later, in 623, the local leader of Mayi 馬邑 (present-day Shuoxian, Shanxi province), another strategic city northwest of Yanmen that had served Turks as a logistic base when attacking China, also submitted himself to the Tang. With both Yanmen and Mayi under its control, the Tang court started to regain the initiative in war against the Turks.³⁸ In response, in 622 the Xieli qaghan assembled a large invading force comprising three armies. Commanding 150,000 elite cavalrymen by himself, Xieli crushed the Tang defense at Yanmen in the eighth month and encircled the old base of the Tang at Taiyuan; two other Turkish armies simultaneously mounted raids from Ganzhou 甘州 (present-day Zhangye, Gansu province) and Yuanzhou 原州 (present-day Guyuan, Ningxia autonomous region), putting Chang'an in immediate danger. While hastily staging a last ditch defense, the Tang court sent Zheng Yuanshu 鄭元璠, an old hand at Turkish affairs who had served five times as messenger to the Turks, to beg for peace. Diplomacy and bribery again worked, and Xieli canceled his campaign.³⁹

³⁶ *JTS* 56, p. 2280; *ZZTJ* 189, p. 5895; and *XTS* 87, p. 3731.

³⁷ *JTS* 62, p. 2379; *ZZTJ* 189, p. 5912; and *THY* 94, p. 1688.

³⁸ *ZZTJ* 190, p. 5968 and *CFYG* 126, p. 17a.

³⁹ *JTS* 62, p. 2380; *THY* 94, p. 1688; and *ZZTJ* 189, p. 5911. Other records suggest that

The outcome of Zheng's mission delighted Li Shimin. However, peace achieved by paying off the enemy with a large amount of annual tribute could hardly last. The Turks often invaded Tang before pressing China for a peaceful settlement in their favor. Gaozu instructed his ministers to deliberate on the relative advantages of peace and war with the Turks. Zheng Yuanshu, the experienced Tang diplomat, preferred unconditional peace; but Feng Deyi 封德彝, secretariat director, disagreed: "If we seek peace with the Turks without having fought against them," said he, "we shall merely show them our weakness; and they will invade us next year. We should attack them, score a victory, and then negotiate peace with them. This is the way to apply the carrot and stick judiciously." Gaozu adopted Feng's suggestion. And the Tang policy toward the Turks started to evolve from subservience to hostility. As Feng had predicted, in 623 a large Turkic force attacked Mayi. At the same time the Turkic leader Xieli also tried to extract from the Tang court a marriage alliance. Gaozu neither caved in to the demand nor rejected the marriage proposal. Instead, he told the Turkic envoy: "Raise the siege of Mayi and we shall discuss marriage."⁴⁰

Next year, in 624, Xieli and his nephew Tuli 突利 (the Tölis qaghan) again mounted a massive offensive. Their troops reached as far as Binzhou 幽州 (present-day Binxian, Shaanxi province), only 130 kilometers northwest of the capital.⁴¹ This incident prompted some Tang officials to suggest relocating the capital further from the northwest frontier. The relocation plan was halted only after Li Shimin had voiced his strong objections.⁴² But it proved more difficult for him instantly to reverse China's inferior military position. Outnumbered and poorly equipped, the Tang army avoided engagement. Li Shimin resorted to fomenting discord between the two qaghans in order to undermine their campaign. He identified Tuli as the major target for his policy of dividing and disintegrating the Turkish ranks.⁴³

With only one hundred cavalymen, Li Shimin went to the front and attempted to persuade Xieli to abandon his invasion by referring to the nominal lord-vassal relationship between the two countries. He then told the qaghan: "If you launch an all out attack, I shall resist you

Xieli qaghan withdrew only after several battles with the Tang troops. See *JTS* 194A, p. 5156, and *XTS* 215A, p. 6030. A record in *ZZTJ* 190, p. 5955, suggests that Zheng Yuanshu referred to the "happy brotherhood (*kundi* 昆弟)" between Taizong and Xieli as a way to persuade the latter to abandon his campaign. However, such brotherhood seems to have existed only between Taizong and Tuli.

⁴⁰ *ZZTJ* 190, pp. 5954, 5973.

⁴¹ *JTS* 1, p. 15; and *ZZTJ* 191, p. 5991.

⁴² *JTS* 2, p. 29; *ZZTJ* 191, p. 5989; and *CFYG* 19, p. 15a; 57, p. 7b.

⁴³ *JTS* 194A, p. 5154, and *XTS* 215A, p. 6029.

with only one hundred cavalymen.” Li Shimin’s wit apparently puzzled Xieli. Suspecting an ambush, he decided not to take further action.⁴⁴ Li Shimin also tried to use his especially close relationship with the Turks to forestall Turkish hostilities. He sent a messenger to Tuli, who had become a sworn brother (*xianghuo xiongdi* 香火兄弟) of Li Shimin five years previously in 617.⁴⁵ The messenger blamed Tuli for having betrayed his sworn brother, and challenged the qaghan to take on Li Shimin.

As a deliberate action to mislead Xieli, Li Shimin then pretended that he was about to cross a water channel (perhaps defensive in nature) that delineated the two camps. Xieli, having learned about the sworn brotherhood and now seeing that Li Shimin was about to perform such an indiscreet act, came to suspect that the Tang emperor and his nephew were plotting against him. A Turkish messenger soon arrived to inform Li Shimin that his master had no ill-intention toward the Tang, and that Li Shimin should not attempt to cross the channel. On Xieli’s order, the Turkish troops moved back. Xieli also decided to send Tuli to negotiate peace with Li Shimin. The Turks eventually withdrew without engagement.⁴⁶

Gaozu’s Internal Cooptation of the Turks

Throughout the 610s and the 620s, the situation on the northwestern frontier looked rather gloomy for China; and the Tang court, unable instantly to alter the balance of power in its own favor, continued its policy of bribery-for-peace toward the Turks. Tang sources faithfully record that “since Gaozu ascended the throne, rewards (for which, read ‘tributary goods’) to the Turks have been innumerable.”⁴⁷ The emperor also maintained his status as a nominal vassal to the Turks. In 619, when Shibi died, he wailed during a funeral service held for the qaghan at Changle Gate 長樂門. He also declared a suspension of court audiences for three days, and ordered metropolitan officials to offer their condolences to the Turkish messenger at the guest house. A Tang of-

⁴⁴ *JTS* 194A, p. 5156; *ZZTJ* 191, pp. 5991-93; and *CFYG* 19, pp. 16a-b.

⁴⁵ *JTS* 194A, p. 5156. Chen Yinke observed that the oath between Li Shimin and Tuli led “the Turks to treating emperor Taizong as one of their own tribesmen. He was therefore a Chinese as well as a Turk. It is indeed surprising that he had such a close ties with the Turks.” He further suggested that the oath was taken when Li Yuan and Li Shimin marched their troops to Daxingcheng 大興城. And the nomadic blood in the mother of Li Shimin seems to be the reason for him to initiate and be accepted into such a brotherhood. See his “Lun Tang Gaozu chengchen Tujue shi,” pp. 107-8; and idem, *Tangdai zhengzhi shi shulun gao* 唐代政治史述論稿 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1982), pp. 1, 13.

⁴⁶ *TD* 197, p. 1069; *JTS* 194A, p. 5156; *XTS* 215A, p. 6031; *THY* 94, p. 1688; and *ZZTJ* 191, pp. 5989-93.

⁴⁷ *JTS* 194, pp. 5153-54; and *XTS* 215A, p. 6033.

ficial, bringing with him as many as 30,000 pieces of silk as gifts, was soon on his way to the Turkish headquarters to participate on behalf of Gaozu in the funeral ceremony for the qaghan.⁴⁸ In fact, whenever a Turkish messenger visited Chang'an, Gaozu tolerated unruly behavior, and granted such messengers preferential treatment.⁴⁹

Although the Tang appeared rather weak on the foreign front, the internal situation in China was steadily improving toward unification and stabilization. Since taking the Sui capital in 617, the Tang armies had engaged the various separatist forces in a series of successful campaigns lasting almost a decade. By 624, the Tang army had eliminated most of the separatist regimes, except the one in northern Shaanxi led by Liang Shidu. Progress in domestic unification now enabled the Tang to adopt a more active policy toward the Turks.

In 625, Gaozu hinted at a change in Chinese attitude toward the Turks. He instructed court officials to use imperial edicts in diplomatic communications with the Turks. By employing the imperial edict, which was meant for Chinese officials as well as foreign "outer subjects," the Tang emperor implied unwillingness to maintain his status as a vassal to the Turks.⁵⁰ But sophisticated games with words could hardly counter the powerful Turks, whose strength lay in their mobility and the lightning speed with which they struck and retreated.

In the sixth month of 626, Li Shimin carried out the famous coup d'état at Xuanwu Gate 玄武門, killing the heir-apparent and Li Yuanji 李元吉, another of his brothers. Shortly after the emperor abdicated in his favor, Li Shimin ascended the throne to become Taizong 太宗. The new emperor knew that the balance of power between China and the Eastern Turks remained in favor of the latter and that passive defense would never secure the northwestern frontiers of his empire. He needed time to prepare his troops, while waiting for internal strife to weaken the Eastern Turks so that he could defeat them in a decisive battle – an event that occurred four years later. The Turks, on the other hand, wasted no time in taking advantage of the resultant discord at the Tang court. Within weeks of Taizong's accession, Xieli and Tuli invaded China with a cavalry force said to be 200,000 strong. They attacked Jingzhou 涇州 (in Gansu province) that same year, in the eighth month. Encountering no resistance, they marched 150 kilometers the next day and reached Wugong 武功 (northwest of present-day Wugong, Shaanxi province). Their swift advancement forced the Tang court hastily to put

⁴⁸ *ZZTJ* 187, p. 5858.

⁴⁹ *CFYQ* 997, p. 11b.

⁵⁰ *THY* 94, p. 1688; *XTS* 215A, p. 6032; and *ZZTJ* 191, p. 5996.

the capital on high alert. On the 28th of the month, the Turks stormed the northern bank of the Wei River 渭水 a few miles north of Chang'an. The capital was in immediate danger.⁵¹

Taizong's Use of Diplomatic Play-Acting to Bribe Xieli

During this perilous time, Taizong appears in most primary sources as a man of courage, wit, and eloquence. Bringing with him only six of his entourage, he confronted Xieli at the Wei River and emerged from danger.⁵² However, most of the accounts were glorifications of Taizong by traditional scholars. The real story was much less glamorous – the meeting with Xieli having been merely a show. Before meeting the qaghan, Taizong had received a Turkish informant named Zhishi Sili 執失思力 and learned from him that the real purpose of Xieli's invasion was to acquire treasure, not to seize Chang'an. Taizong chose bribery as a method to head off disaster, as would emerge only later.

Taizong emerged from the secret meeting with Sili and actually staged a play, with Sili, in front of his staff. Conducting himself in a boastful manner, Zhishi Sili said: "Our two qaghans Xieli and Tuli have arrived with one million soldiers." In return, Taizong put on a face of courage and indignation:

I have personally cemented friendship with your qaghans, and have presented [them] innumerable treasures and silks. Now your qaghans, breaking their own promises, have led troops to penetrate [China]. How shameless this is! Although a barbarian, you should also have a conscience. How could you have totally forgotten the great favor [of the Tang court], and boasted shamelessly of your power. I shall have you executed first!

Pretending that he was frightened, Sili asked to offer his services to Taizong in lieu of the death penalty. Taizong's staff, not knowing the two were play-acting, urged the emperor to send Sili back with due courtesy. "If I send him back, the barbarians would think that I fear them; they would humiliate us even more wantonly." Instead, he ordered Sili imprisoned at the Chancellery.⁵³ This was in fact a measure to protect Sili, who never lost favor with Taizong.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *JTS* 2, p. 30; Liu Su 劉誅, *Sui Tang jiahua* 隋唐嘉話 (*Tang Wudai biji xiaoshu daguan* edn. Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2000) A, p. 94.

⁵² *TD* 197, p. 1070; *JTS* 194A, p. 5157; *XTS* 215A, p. 6033; and *ZZTJ* 191, pp. 6019–20.

⁵³ *JTS* 2, p. 30; 194A, p. 5157 and *ZZTJ* 191, p. 6019.

⁵⁴ *TD* 197, p. 1070; *XTS* 110, p. 4116; and *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6072.

Knowing that neither he nor Chang'an was in any real danger, Taizong decided to meet with Xieli so as to present himself as having been in control of the situation. He chose not to enlighten his subordinates on his intention, which was to bribe the Turks, not to engage them. This approach was based both on the valuable information given him by Zhishi Sili as well as the prudent advice provided by Li Jing 李靖, a famous general who had urged him to "use all the treasures in the warehouse to bribe [the Turks] so as to seek a truce with them."⁵⁵

Arriving at the southern bank of the Wei River with his companions, Taizong accused Xieli of breaking his promises. Then, as a show of force, Tang troops began arriving. With his envoy, Tuli, not returning, Taizong approaching boldly, and Tang troops putting on a show of force, Xieli feared a trap. Taizong signaled his troops to move back from the river bank and to deploy. He then talked to Xieli alone. Nobody knew what exactly they talked about, but subsequent events suggest that the two agreed on a non-aggression pact and a regular exchange of goods.⁵⁶ Toward the end of the eighth month, a ceremony was held on a bridge west of Chang'an, during which a white horse was slaughtered as a sacrifice to the gods and Taizong and Xieli took an oath of alliance. The Turkish troops then retreated to the steppe.⁵⁷

In retrospect, although vulnerable to the Turkish threat, Chang'an had never been in real danger. From the very beginning, Xieli intended his operation primarily to extract valuable goods from Tang, rather than to storm the fortified Tang capital, which could hold out for days. As a result, his soldiers were mostly light cavalymen, who could march and charge swiftly, but were ill-prepared for prolonged warfare. Xieli had only provided his cavalymen with extra mounts, but no proper logistical support or equipment that would allow them to attack Chang'an – an idea that he had never contemplated.

The peaceful outcome of the incident at the Wei River surprised many Tang officials, who had opposed Taizong's meeting with Xieli and now asked their master to elaborate on his tactics. In reply, Taizong admitted for the first time that all along his stratagem was bribery-for-peace:

When observing them, I noticed that the Turks, although numerous, were poorly disciplined, and they, from the leaders to the subjects, aimed only at seeking bribes ... I therefore ordered my soldiers to roll up their armor and cover up their weapons, and enticed the Turks with valuables and silks. Once they got what they

⁵⁵ Liu, *Sui Tang jiahua* a, p. 94.

⁵⁶ *JTS* 2, p. 30; 194A, p. 5159.

⁵⁷ *JTS* 2, p. 30.

wanted, the Turks would, of course, retreat; and become arrogant, lazy, and slack [at military preparedness.] We [in the meantime] will develop our [military] strength and wait for a dispute [to occur among the Turkish leaders]. Then we shall wipe them out at one stroke. This is what “give in order to take” means.

Taizong’s handling of the incident at the Wei River was a brilliant example of “steering safely clear of danger” by using intelligence about the enemy. But his treatment of the Turks was not merely an expedient measure hastily adopted to deal with an emergency. It was based on an objective assessment of the domestic situations and on a careful consideration of a policy appropriate to the relative strength between the Tang and the Turks. As Taizong explained to his subordinates in the ninth month of 626,

I decided not to fight the Turks because I have just ascended the throne. Our country is still unstable, and our people poor. I therefore refrained from rash actions (*jing* 靜) so as to pacify them. If I waged war against them, both sides would suffer great losses and become foes. Out of fear, the Turks would strengthen their preparedness against us. And I shall never fulfill my ambition [of defeating them].⁵⁸

This idea of *jing* was a guide for Taizong, as he bided his time with the Turks and other neighbors. It allowed him to contemplate the important ways that diplomacy and ploys could be used to avoid military conflict.

FROM STRATEGIC DEFENSE TO OFFENSE

After Taizong established his reign in 627, the new emperor proclaimed that refined culture and moral virtue would be the principles for his domestic and foreign policies.⁵⁹ Just as their master, many early-Tang courtiers were also cautious and pragmatic when handling the surrendered foreign tribal chieftains. Li Daliang 李大亮 (586–644) suggested a “loose rein” policy, which would allow these leaders and their followers to remain in their homeland north of the Great Wall, thus enabling the Tang court to provide them only superficial benefits and to bring about real gains to China.⁶⁰

It was fortunate for China that the existing rift among the Eastern Turks worsened in the 620s. This new development prompted some

⁵⁸ *JTS* 194A, p. 5158; and *ZZTJ* 191, p. 6020.

⁶⁰ *JTS* 62, p. 2389.

⁵⁹ *JTS* 28, p. 1045.

Tang officials to suggest in 627 that Tang take the opportunity to attack the Turks. Interested in the suggestion, Taizong consulted Xiao Yu 蕭瑀 and Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌. Xiao supported the idea, but Zhangsun urged caution: "The troops of a [sage] king would never act in bad faith and tire the people by attacking barbarians who have not raided China's borders." Taizong dropped the idea of an attack,⁶¹ but only temporarily. He glossed his decision with high moral justifications: "To break a recently reached alliance is to act in bad faith; to take advantage of other's misfortune is a deed of heartlessness; to score a victory out of the enemy's difficulty is a move of cowardice. Even if the Turks have all betrayed their masters and have lost all their domestic animals, I shall not attack them. I shall do so only after they have committed a crime [against us]."⁶² Soon afterward, Zhang Gongjin 張公謹, supervisor-in-chief of Daizhou 代州 (present-day Daixian, Shanxi province), who was familiar with Turkic affairs, stated six factors that had been contributing to the formation of destructive forces within the Turkish empire; and that these forces, combined with Tang military initiatives, would soon bring down their deteriorating empire.⁶³ Zhang's analysis was indeed penetrating. Xieli had alienated his tribal followers by using Chinese advisors, adopting Chinese practices in governance, and entrusting power to Sogdians and other central Asians. When successive natural disasters brought starvation and death to large numbers of Turks and their herds, Xieli raised taxes. These measures pushed tribes in Manchuria to transfer allegiance to the Tang; the Xueyantuo 薛延陀 (Sir-Tarduch), the Uighurs, and the Bayegu 拔野古 (Bayirqu, a tribe active in the vast areas north of Lake Baykal) also revolted against Xieli.⁶⁴ Taizong then took back his earlier promise and attacked in 630.

While some tribes turned their back on their Turkish masters, the discord among the Turkish elite that had already come into the open during the Wei River incident intensified. Xieli blamed the betrayal of the tribes in Manchuria on Tuli, who, with his headquarters conveniently located north of Youzhou 幽州, had the overall responsibility of supervising the various tribes in the eastern part of the vast Turkish empire. The relationship between the two worsened when Tuli failed

⁶¹ *ZZTJ* 192, p. 6037.

⁶² *JTS* 194A, p. 5158; *ZZTJ* 192, p. 6064.

⁶³ These six factors are: first, Xieli had become a fatuous ruler; second, tribes subordinate to the Turks were contemplating rebellion; third, Turkish generals and soldiers had suffered military setbacks; fourth, bad weather caused shortages in provisions and forage; fifth, tension between Xieli and other Turkish leaders had intensified; and last, Chinese collaborators now harbored disloyal sentiments toward their Turkish masters. See *JTS* 68, p. 2507, and *ZZTJ* 193, 6065.

⁶⁴ *JTS* 62, p. 2380; 194A, p. 5159 and *ZZTJ* 192, 6064.

to suppress the rebellious Xueyantuo and Uighurs that Xieli had sent him to do. Xieli had him flogged and imprisoned for more than ten days before releasing him.⁶⁵ Humiliated, Tuli became openly disobedient to Xieli. In 628, he refused to let Xieli conscript soldiers from his tribesmen. Outraged, Xieli ordered an attack on Tuli, which became the last straw in their relationship. In an attempt to plot a rebellion against his uncle, Tuli dispatched a messenger to seek military assistance from the Tang. But Taizong refused to help. Despairing of success in a showdown with Xieli, Tuli submitted himself to the Tang court in the twelfth month of 629. Yusheshe 郁射設 was another Turkish leader that betrayed Xieli.⁶⁶ And internal disputes also resulted in some Turkish leaders leaving the Turkish Empire for other places.⁶⁷

The rifts among the Turkish elite weakened their grip on subordinate tribes. This development triggered a chain reaction of defections by tribes not only in Tuli's territories, but also in other parts of the Turkish Empire. Yuan Junzhang 苑君璋, head of the Branch Department of State Affairs that was part of a puppet government that the Turks had established to control the Chinese separatist groups, deserted his Turkish master in the fifth month of 627. He was perhaps the first to do so.⁶⁸ Khitan, Xi, Xii (mentioned above) and several dozen other tribes followed suit in 628.⁶⁹ In the twelfth month of 629, the Malgal chieftain sent his tribute-paying envoy to Tang.⁷⁰ Of the renegade tribes on the northern fringe of the Turkish Empire, some fifteen, including the Uighurs, the Bayegu, the Adie 阿跌, the Tongluo 同羅, the Pugu 僕固 and the Xi, switched their loyalty to the Xueyantuo and recognized its chieftain as their new ruler. Together they formed a formidable anti-Turkish coalition and presented a direct threat to the Turkish leadership. The vast Eastern Turkish empire started to crumble.

From the 630s, the Tang court began its strategic offensive. To justify military operations, Taizong wanted his courtiers to forget that he had once played a major role in making deals with the Turks. In 630, he started referring to the incident at the Wei River in 627 as a humiliation.⁷¹ "When we began building our country," said Taizong to his subjects, "the abdicated emperor [Li Yuan] became a vassal to Xieli

⁶⁵ *TD* 197, p. 1070; *JTS* 194A, p. 5159; *XTS* 215A, p. 6034; *THY* 94, p. 1689; and *ZZTJ* 192, p. 6037, p. 6049.

⁶⁶ *JTS* 61, p. 2369; 69, p. 2524 and *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6067.

⁶⁷ *JTS* 57, pp. 2300-1; 109, pp. 3289-90; *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6066. ⁶⁸ *ZZTJ* 192, p. 6035.

⁶⁹ *JTS* 194A, p. 5160; 199b, p. 5350; and *ZZTJ* 192, pp. 6049-50.

⁷⁰ *ZZTJ* 192, p. 6049; 193, p. 6067; and *CFYG* 991, p. 4b.

⁷¹ *JTS* 67, p. 2479; and *XTS* 93, p. 3814.

for the sake of [the well-being of] common people. How could I not feel bitter about this? How could I not resolve to subdue the Turks? Before achieving this goal, I could neither sit peacefully, nor have an appetite for food.”⁷² He instructed official historians responsible for compiling the *Veritable Records* (*shilu* 實錄) of his reign to cover up his role in the incident and to blame his father alone for having entered a lord-vassal relationship with the Turks.⁷³ However, Taizong could not deny that the relationship in question and the bribery-for-peace approach were the two cornerstones of Tang diplomacy toward the Turks. Given Tang strength relative to that of the Turks before 630, they were the only sensible policies for the Tang to pursue with the Turks. And Taizong was a major player both in forming and implementing these policies.

Under the policy of “displaying military force and conquering the barbarians,”⁷⁴ Tang troops carried out three major military campaigns: the conquest of the Eastern Turks in 630, the defeat of the Tuyuhun tribe in the Lake Kokonor area in 634, and the subjugation of Gaochang 高昌 (Karakhoja, located in present-day Turfan, Xinjiang province) in 640. Hand-in-hand with territorial expansion went the establishment of “loose rein” prefectures (*jimi zhou* 羈縻州) in the newly conquered areas. These were quasi Chinese administrative structures headed by chieftains of the defeated nomadic tribes. At the peak of the Tang power, these prefectures numbered more than eight hundred. To ensure effective control, area-commands (Dudu fu 都督府) staffed and backed by Chinese officials and troops were organized and placed in command of “loose rein” prefectures. Protectorates (Duhu fu 都護府) were also established in areas west of the present-day Gansu province, then known as the “Western Regions,” in northern Vietnam, and in Korea to administer daily government affairs. A vast Tang empire was taking shape that would eventually stretch over 9,000 *li* east to west, and more than 10,000 *li* north to south, and encompass areas in northern Korean peninsula, Mongolia and Eastern Turkistan.⁷⁵

⁷² Xie, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao*, p. 45; and *JTS* 67, p. 2480.

⁷³ See, e.g., “Basic Annals of Gaozu” in *JTS* 1, p. 18. For discussions of inaccuracies in the *Veritable Records of Taizong*, see *JTS* 82, pp. 2761–65; *XTS* 233A, pp. 6335–39; *THY* 63, pp. 1093–94; and *CFY* 556, pp. 14b–15a; 562, pp. 8b–9b, pp. 14a–b. See also Li Shutong, “Tang Taizong weishui zhi chi jiqi yingxiang” 唐太宗渭水之恥及其影響, in Lin Tien-wai and Joseph Wong, eds., *Tang Song shi yanjiu* 唐宋史研究 (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1987), pp. 5–7; Denis C. Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History under the Tang* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1992), pp. 127–28; and Howard J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the Court of Tang Tai-tsung* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1974), pp. 23–27.

⁷⁴ *JTS* 71, p. 2558; *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6085.

⁷⁵ *ZZTJ* 195, p. 6156.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND IN FOREIGN RELATIONS AND
WEI ZHENG'S SIXTEEN-CHARACTER FOREIGN POLICY

Wei Zheng (580–643), a minister during Taizong's reign, was the first to realize that China's military successes could lead to a dangerous expansionist foreign policy with disastrous consequences to his country. And the danger was very real. As Zhangsun Wuji once pointed out: "During the early years of the Zhenguan reign period (627–649), many courtiers suggested in their memorials that '[China should] flaunt its military might and mount punitive campaigns against the barbarians.'" But Wei Zheng acted against the prevailing sentiment in the court, and raised a famous sixteen-character policy to handle both domestic and foreign issues: "Cease military actions and nourish civil culture 偃戈興文, spread virtue and bestow favors 佈德施惠, when China settles into peace 中國既安, people from far will obey us of their own accord 遠人自服."⁷⁶

Wei Zheng's policy showed the influence of an assortment of intellectual traditions from remote antiquity: the Confucian ideal that "the sage kings (of the Western Zhou dynasty) displayed virtue not force 耀德不觀兵" when dealing with the non-Chinese;⁷⁷ and the Daoist teaching that an ideal ruler should rear common people by good governance, and avoid undue interference in their lives so as to bring tranquility to the world. But Wei's policy was primarily the product of his thorough understanding of the changing situation in China and of the appropriate actions the Tang court should take: while settling into lasting peace, China had yet fully to recover from the devastation caused by civil war. With limited national resources, the Tang court had to be moderate in setting goals. Rational allocation of resources was needed in order to handle China's competing needs at home and abroad. Restraint from using sheer force to attain military objectives abroad was also needed, so as to solve domestic problems by administrative means.⁷⁸

Wei Zheng's foreign policy was sober-minded, characterized by objective assessment of China's strength. In his eyes, the Tang dynasty, ten years after its founding, had barely healed its wounds from civil wars, and was akin to a person who had just recovered from a ten-year illness: merely skin and bone, he was unable to travel fifty kilometers a day with a heavy sack of rice on his back.⁷⁹ Thus, China had a limited capability to engage its enemies. Peaceful intercourse with

⁷⁶ *JTS* 71, p. 2558; *XTS* 221a, p. 6241; *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6085.

⁷⁷ *Guo yu* 國語 (SBCK edn.) 1, pp. 1a–2a.

⁷⁸ *JTS* 28, p. 1045.

⁷⁹ *JTS* 71, p. 2560; Xie, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao*, pp. 125–26.

or military campaigns against foreign countries would deplete scarce Tang resources.

This assessment led Wei Zheng to base his foreign policy mainly on considerations of China's ability to supply the demands of foreign countries. To Wei Zheng, a request that a foreign ruler submit to China, the arrival of a foreign envoy at the Tang court, the settlement of defeated nomads on Chinese soil, a marriage alliance with the Tang royal family, and many other acts involving the Tang with neighboring countries were all foreign demands on China. He felt that China should be prudent in granting such requests.

In 628, Wei Zheng admonished Taizong not to allow ten small kingdoms in the "Western Regions" to pay tribute to China. He argued:

China, although quite stable now, has yet to recover from the devastation of war. Labor service would disturb the people. When the ruler of Gaochang last visited the court, local authorities on his route to Chang'an could barely supply his needs. How could we burden them with the reception of ten foreign missions? We may allow foreigners to trade freely along the borders, because it would benefit frontier people. But it would be a disadvantage to China if we receive foreigners as state guests. Should we allow the ten kingdoms to pay tribute, their delegations would amount to some one thousand people. How could the frontier prefectures manage?⁸⁰

Wei Zheng was particularly concerned about costly military assistance to Tang's nominal vassals. Li Baiyao 李百藥 (565–648) shared his concern as well. He authored a work titled "On Enfeoffment" ("Fengjian lun" 封建論), in which he advanced this concern in the form of a eulogy of Taizong: "Whenever the four barbarians come to offer tributes [to China] and travel thousands of miles to submit themselves to the benevolence [of Taizong], your majesty always goes into retreat to reflect [on the matter] with concentrated attention and hard thinking. [You do so because you] are afraid that [accepting the barbarians] will unduly burden China and serve [the interests] of remote countries."⁸¹ These considerations of Wei Zheng and Li Baiyao apparently influenced Taizong – so much so that in 631 he rejected the request by Kangguo 康國 (Samarkand) to become a satellite state of China. "In the past," said Taizong to his ministers, "some emperors were fond of attracting foreign tribute to gain a reputation for pacifying foreigners. But these tributes are of no use, and the reception of foreign missions will bur-

⁸⁰ *JTS* 71, p. 2548.

⁸¹ *JTS* 72, p. 2576.

den my people. Now Kangguo wishes to submit to China. Out of righteousness, we have to assist them if they are threatened in the future. Wouldn't it exhaust my troops if they had to march ten thousand *li* (to Samarkand)? To burden my people for the sake of superficial reputation is not something I shall do."⁸²

As a matter of fact, the expense and the burden of it on common people were the major concerns of Wei Zheng when he examined any policy. He memorialized the throne in 632 objecting to the proposal that Taizong perform the "sacrifices of state," a grand ceremony to be attended by both high-ranking officials and foreign rulers to offer sacrifices to Heaven and Earth in celebration of unity, peace and prosperity in China. He candidly pointed out:

Although abundant harvests have continued for a few years, our granaries are still quite empty; although the domestic situation has been stabilized, China is not yet ready for such an arduous task as the sacrifices of state. When rulers of remote barbarian countries come to attend the ceremony in the name of admiration of Your Majesty's righteousness, we would be unable to meet their needs 無以供其求. ...Besides, how could we let the barbarians see our weakness?⁸³

Taizong shared Wei Zheng's concerns. During the early years of his reign, the emperor's policies similarly exhibited Daoism's influence, not that of Confucianism. The early Tang was a time of strong nomadic cultural influence derived from the previous Northern Dynasties (386–581), and not a heyday of Confucianism. "At that time," observed a contemporary monk, "the Tang had just laid its foundation; (civil) war was incessant. The court treated the military strategies of Sun Wu 孫武 and Wu Qi 吳起 (?–381 BC) as urgent matters, and had no time for Confucianism and Buddhism."⁸⁴ The Tang imperial family reinforced this nomadic cultural legacy, which endorsed, among other things, the use of force and utilitarianism. Military achievements became the principle way to gain promotion and social prestige; Confucian scholars were laughed at as bookworms.⁸⁵ In 626, one year prior to his enthronement, Taizong already indicated that he preferred tran-

⁸² ZZTJ 193, p. 6091. Fan Zuyu 範祖禹, a Song-dynasty scholar, praised Taizong's decision as one that set a good example for future rulers of China. See his *Tang jian* 唐鑑 (facs. of So. Song edn.; Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1984) 2, p. 9b.

⁸³ JTS 71, p. 2560; Liu, *Da Tang xinyu* 13, p. 196.

⁸⁴ Huili 惠立 and Yancong 彥棕, *Da cien si Sanzang fashi zhuan* 大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983) 1, p. 7.

⁸⁵ JTS 61, p. 2364.

quility (*qingjing* 清靜) and inaction (*wuwei* 無爲) as the ways of pacifying the non-Chinese.⁸⁶ In 630, Taizong authored an article “On the Fundamentals of Governance” (“Zhengben lun” 政本論), in which the Daoist concept of tranquility was a major principle for his administration: “Keeping the fundamental [China] intact is the gist of governance. If China does not enjoy tranquility, what benefit would there be in having the remote barbarians come [to visit the Tang]?”⁸⁷

Taizong was particularly mindful of the excessive military operations and unbearable taxes on common people that had eventually led to the collapse of the Sui dynasty. Faced with repeated Turkic harassments of Tang frontiers, some courtiers suggested that the Great Wall be repaired and commoners be stationed in the watchtowers. But Taizong rejected the idea on the ground that his people should not be burdened with such an arduous task.⁸⁸ In 635, he stated that, “Having witnessed [the demise of the Sui], I work hard day and night. My only goal is tranquility so that there will be peace in the world. ... To me, governing a country is akin to growing a tree. If the roots are healthy, the branches and leaves will be luxuriant. If a ruler could refrain from rash actions, how can common people not enjoy happiness?”⁸⁹ In the second month of 637, the emperor promulgated an imperial edict, announcing Laozi as the ancestor of the Tang imperial family.⁹⁰ The same edict also raised Daoist priests to a status superior to that of Buddhist monks. This edict further confirmed the pivotal role of Daoism in political life: “Laozi has shown us the model. The gist [of his teaching] is tranquility and inaction. ... Now our country has settled into great stability. This should be credited to [the policy of] inaction.”⁹¹ This mention of Daoist political ideals, which would become ever more central to the Tang imperial mission, shows yet another form of foreign policy thought early in the Tang.

⁸⁶ *JTS* 194A, p. 5158; *ZZTJ* 191, p. 6020. Taizong's ideas were closely in line with the thinking of Laozi: “The people are difficult to govern: It is because those in authority are too fond of action.” See *Laozi dejing* 老子德經 (SBCK edn.), p. 18b; English translation is D. C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching* (Hong Kong: The Chinese U.P., 1963), p. 109.

⁸⁷ Dong Gao 董誥, *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Taipei: Dahua shuju, 1987; hereafter, *QTW*) 10, p. 48. In 628, Taizong emphasized: “Inaction of the ruler will bring about happiness to his people.”

⁸⁸ *ZZTJ* 192, p. 6049.

⁸⁹ Xie, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao*, p. 41, p. 424.

⁹⁰ Huili and Yancong, *Da cien si* 9, p. 193. Zhang Junfang 張君房, *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (SBCK edn.) 122, pp. 4b–5a. In fact, Gaozu had already made a similar claim in 619. See *THY* 50, p. 865; *Hunyuan sheng ji* 混元聖跡 (in Shao Yizheng 邵以正 ed., *Zhentong daoang* 正統道藏 [Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1977]) 8, p. 117; *QTW* 928, p. 4343.

⁹¹ *TDZLJ* 113, p. 537; Daoxuan 道宣, *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (SBCK edn.) 25, pp. 11a–b. To Taizong, however, “inaction” did not mean “doing nothing,” but “doing nothing

MANAGING THE NON-CHINESE BY “LOOSE REIN”

The idea of inaction and a shrewd calculation of China's strength relative to its neighbors led early-Tang officials to believe that China could afford neither undue generosity toward nor aggressive military actions against foreigners. Instead, “loose rein” (*jimi* 羈縻) should be the most effective policy for managing the non-Chinese. “Loose rein” was a metaphorical term invented by officials during the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD). They compared managing foreign relations to controlling horses and oxen. To them, implementing a foreign policy was akin to using halter (*ji* 羈) and bridle (*mi* 縻) on draught animals. This policy required China to “return all courtesies from foreign countries 羈縻之義，禮無不答.”⁹² No visiting foreign ruler or his envoy should be denied a court audience as long as he complied with Chinese ceremonial,⁹³ since such a visit was deemed a reflection of the far-reaching moral influence of the Son of Heaven.

The “loose rein” policy of the Han had an apparent cosmopolitan connotation. And this influenced some Tang officials when they debated the settlement policy for the recently submitted Eastern Turks in 630. The prevailing sentiment among the Tang courtiers was that the court should break up the Turkic tribes, whose number amounted to over 100,000, relocate them to prefectures and counties, and teach them farming and weaving. The aim of this policy was to “transform the barbarians into peasants, and thus forever empty the lands north of the Great Wall.”⁹⁴ Typical of those Tang ministers was Wen Yanbo 溫彥博. He suggested that the Turks be settled along the Great Wall, be allowed to retain their respective tribes and to preserve their own customs. To him, this was a sensible policy that would transform the Turkic resettlement areas into buffer zones for China and, more importantly, project an image of a universal king for Taizong. He explained to the emperor:

The king's attitude toward all living things should be the same as that of the heaven and the earth: They cover and carry everything, and leave nothing behind. Now the Turks, driven into an impasse, have surrendered to us. Why should we reject them? Confucius

against the way.” In one of his poems, he revealed that, in his policy thinking, the prerequisite for “a tranquil universe resulting from inaction” was to “hold the commander's tally and pacify the three frontiers,” and “to enforce the law and govern the common people.” See *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1960) 1, p. 3.

⁹² Fan Ye 範曄, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973) 89, p. 2946.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 89, p. 2946.

⁹⁴ *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6075. Tang ministers had minor disagreements on where and how to settle the surrendered Turks. See, for example, the opinions of Yan Shigu, Li Baiyao, and Dou Jing 竇靜 in *ibid.* 193, pp. 6075–76 and *XTS* 95, p. 3849.

once said: “provide education for all without discrimination.” If we save [the Turks] from death, teach them ways to make a living, and educate them with rituals and righteousness, they shall all become our people after a few years.

He further suggested that the Turkic chieftains should be kept in Chang’an as hostages, thus effectively separating them from their tribesmen. “[If we adopt this policy], what kind of trouble could they cause in the future?”⁹⁵

Wei Zheng, however, disagreed with his peers. In his opinion, the Tang “loose rein” policy should not closely follow the Han practice. It should be one of limited involvement with foreign countries. At the heart of this policy was the notion that a political distance from foreign countries should be maintained; no substantive relationship should be established with, and no excessive political, economic, or military obligations should be owed to, these countries. To Wei Zheng, the policy most appropriate for China and the Turks was to send the Turks home to the steppes, not keep them in China, because the Turks were shifting in their loyalty toward China: “They will submit [to China] when they are weak, but rebel [against us] when they are strong. Such is their nature.” Turkic-Chinese relations were always shaped by Tang’s strength relative to that of the Turks and by China’s domestic situation. And the status quo could evolve either in favor or disfavor of China. Wei was mindful of allowing some 100,000 surrendered Turks to stay in China: “After a few years,” he cautioned Taizong, “their number will double. They will become a serious hidden danger for us.”⁹⁶

Acting on this notion, Wei Zheng and his supporters opposed Wen Yanbo’s settlement proposal and any attempt to transform neighboring countries by force into vassal states of China. They emphasized the cultivation of civil culture to attract the non-Chinese 徠之, the spread of moral influence to make them obey 附之, and the dispatch of trusted subjects to pacify them 撫之. They justified and supported repulsing military assaults on Chinese borders and keeping Chinese troops on alert 備之,⁹⁷ but did not seek to conquer and incorporate foreign countries into the Chinese territory. They compared foreign lands to “stony fields,” which were not arable and whose people were unlikely to be reformed by Chinese customs.⁹⁸ There was neither advantage nor disadvantage in acquiring or losing such land.⁹⁹ In Tang

⁹⁵ Xie, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao*, pp. 503–4; *XTS* 99, p. 3912; *ZZTJ* 193, pp. 6076–77.

⁹⁶ *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6076.

⁹⁷ *JTS* 199b, p. 5364; *TD* 185, p. 985; *CFYG* 997, p. 8a.

⁹⁸ *TD* 185, p. 985. ⁹⁹ *JTS* 199B, p. 5364.

diplomatic vocabulary, “acquiring a piece of stony field” was an expression of biting sarcasm toward any expansionist policy that brought about no real benefit to China.¹⁰⁰ The best way to deal with remote and rebellious countries was to tolerate them as long as they did not attack Chinese borders.¹⁰¹ In the meantime, China should assume an active defense posture on the foreign front. While refraining from military suppression of the rebellious non-Chinese, China should also maintain military vigilance even when the non-Chinese were submissive to the Chinese court.¹⁰² This way of thinking held that should military action be needed, only loosely defined, ad hoc procedures would be required to stabilize an area.¹⁰³

Due to Wei Zheng’s influence, the early-Tang “loose rein” policy sometimes displayed a considerable degree of tolerance and flexibility 闊略.¹⁰⁴ The Tang court demanded no total loyalty from its neighbors. It allowed countries in the “Western Regions” to practice equidistant diplomacy during the seventh and early eighth centuries when north-west Asia was polarized between the Chinese and the Turks first, and then the Tibetans.¹⁰⁵ Envoys from countries of dubious political inclinations were welcomed at the Tang court as long as they duly observed the Chinese court protocols.

Taizong hailed Wei Zheng’s “loose rein” policy as the “best policy 上策” for China, since it conformed to the sage kings’ method of governance.¹⁰⁶ Tang officials of later times often referred to this policy in their debates, and compared it with the less desirable “second best policy 中策” of the Qin 秦 dynasty (246–207 BC), whereby the Great Wall was constructed to defend China. Although the Qin borders were secured, construction of the wall exhausted commoners, who rebelled and brought the Qin empire down. The Han expansionist policy, in contrast, was harshly criticized by some Tang officials. They labeled it a “non-policy 無策,” for having committed China’s resources to territorial expansion into areas of no use to China.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Li Yanshou once explained why China should not let matters concerning the barbarians burden its people: “The useless [the barbarians and their land] should not harm the useful [the Chinese people].” He further warned that excessive territorial expansion would lead to the collapse of a dynasty. See his *Bei shi* 94, p. 3138; 97, pp. 3239–40.

¹⁰¹ Liu Xiang 劉向, *Xin xu* 新序 (SBCK edn.) 10, p. 15b.

¹⁰² *JTS* 71, p. 2558; *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6085; 194, p. 6213.

¹⁰³ *JTS* 91, p. 2940.

¹⁰⁴ *JTS* 66, p. 2466; Xie, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao*, p. 475; *ZZTJ* 193, pp. 6078–79.

¹⁰⁵ For discussions of Sino-Tibetan relations, see Pan Yihong, “Sino-Tibetan Treaties in the Tang Dynasty,” *TP* 78 (1992), pp. 116–61; and Denis Twitchett, “Tibet in Tang’s Grand Strategy,” in Hans van de Ven, ed., *Warfare in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 106–79.

¹⁰⁶ *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6067; *XTS* 215A, p. 6023.

¹⁰⁷ *XTS* 215A, pp. 6023–24.

The Tang “loose rein” policy was reciprocal in nature. It enabled China to satisfy at low cost its own needs and those of its neighbors in mutual relationship. The policy kept China in touch with the outside world; but it also defined a political distance between the Middle Kingdom and the non-Chinese, thus freeing the Tang emperor from political, economic, and military obligations to his foreign counterparts. Under the “loose rein” policy, China refrained from territorial expansion, saving the enormous expense of military campaigns, establishment of administrations, stationing of troops in acquired areas, and suppression of rebellions.¹⁰⁸ The “loose rein” policy furthermore enabled China’s neighbors access to China’s material civilization and high culture at almost no risk. They needed neither to offer political allegiance to the Central Kingdom, nor change their own customs. This unique nature of the “loose rein” policy was the reason for Tang China’s diplomatic success. In 647, Taizong himself pointed out: “In my relations with the northern and western barbarians, I could gain from them what previous rulers could not gain, and subjugate those whom previous rulers could not subjugate. This is because I always go with what people (Chinese and barbarian) desire.”¹⁰⁹

Taizong’s remarks also revealed that his “loose rein” policy was rooted in ancient political thinking: The goodness of a government “is determined by its nourishment of people.”¹¹⁰ Mencius further developed the latter into a theory of “the fundamental importance of the people (*minben* 民本).” It emphasized, among other things, that the well-being of people was the primary concern of a benevolent ruler.¹¹¹ The sober-minded Tang officials also regarded “the Chinese people as the basis of the world 中國百姓天下根本.”¹¹² Excessive involvement with foreign countries regardless of its burden on people should therefore be frowned upon. To Wei Zheng and his contemporaries, the concept of *minben* was a basic principle in policy-making: considerations for China’s internal order, prosperity, and security should claim precedence over those for territorial expansion. When the management of foreign relations and the solution of crucial domestic issues were competing for limited national resources, priority must be given to the latter.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ *JTS* 91, p. 2940.

¹⁰⁹ *ZZTJ* 198, p. 6246. Taizong further elaborated this point by referring to the rulership of the sages in high antiquity, saying that their success was due to their ability to “identify their interests with those of the people 與民同利.”

¹¹⁰ *Shang shu zhengyi* 尚書正義 (SSJZS edn.) 4, p. 135; Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893. rpt. Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1960) 1, pp. 55–56.

¹¹¹ For discussions of this issue, see Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, trans., F. W. Mote (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1979) 1, pp. 155–56.

¹¹² *JTS* 62, p. 2388; *ZZTJ* 195, p. 6132.

¹¹³ *JTS* 72, p. 2567.

China should employ its scarce resources to strengthen the Central Kingdom rather than wasting them on unnecessary involvement with foreign countries.

These considerations prompted Li Daliang to memorialize the court in the 630s not to settle the recently surrendered Western Turks near the capital.¹¹⁴ In the 640s, both Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (579–648) and Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–658) objected to the military campaigns against Koguryō.¹¹⁵ Chu and Wei Zheng also criticized the pacification of the northern nomads, and the conquest of Gaochang.¹¹⁶ Using seven characters, Chu justified his objections in 642: “China must take precedence over the barbarians 先華夏而後夷狄.”¹¹⁷ Wei, on the other hand, questioned the viability of seizing the land of Gaochang and transforming it into a Tang prefecture:

A force of over 1,000 [Tang] soldiers needs to be stationed there permanently. A few years later when it is time for relief, one third of these soldiers [heading home or traveling to Gaochang] will die on the road. Moreover, people in the Longyou 隴右 region will have to bear the burden of providing [the soldiers with] clothing and other necessities, and endure the hardship of parting with their loved ones. In ten years the entire region will be exhausted. Moreover, your majesty will be unable to collect from Gaochang either a handful of grain or one piece of cloth to help China. I would call this “dispersing the useful [the resources of Tang] to serve the useless [the newly acquired Gaochang].”¹¹⁸

Taizong shared many of the concerns raised by his ministers. In his essay “On the Fundamentals of Governance,” he stated: “The gist of governance is to seek to perfect the things that are fundamental. If China is not in peace, what is the use of having remote barbarians come to pay tribute?”¹¹⁹ Using vivid analogies, some early-Tang courtiers enthusiastically articulated Taizong’s opinion. Li Daliang compared China to the trunk of a tree, and its neighbors to the branches. For a tree to be vigorous, its trunk must be healthy and strong whereas

¹¹⁴ *JTS* 62, pp. 2388–89; *ZZTJ* 193, pp. 6081–82. See also Pan Yihong, “Early Chinese Settlement Policies towards the Nomads,” *AM* 3d ser. 5.2 (1992), pp. 61–77.

¹¹⁵ *JTS* 66, p. 2466; 80, p. 2733.

¹¹⁶ *JTS* 80, p. 2733, pp. 2736–37; *ZZTJ* 196, p. 6178.

¹¹⁷ *JTS* 80, pp. 2736–37; *ZZTJ* 196, p. 6178; Xie, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao*, p. 507.

¹¹⁸ *ZZTJ* 195, pp. 6155–56; Xie, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao*, pp. 507–8. Chu Suiliang saw Karakhoja as “the hands and feet of other people” and the Longyou region, “chest and abdomen” of China. This idea is in line with the Tang court’s overall strategy: The Guanlong 關隴 regions were central to China’s security. For discussions of this issue, see Chen Yinke, “Waizu shengshuai zhi lianluan xing ji waihuan yu neizheng zhi guanxi” 外族盛衰之連環性及外患與內政之關係, in his *Tangdai zhengzhi shi shulun gao*, p. 133, 136–37.

¹¹⁹ *QW* 10, p. 48.

the branches must be relatively weak.¹²⁰ His analogy originated from an ancient political belief: for China to be in good order, the Son of Heaven must be stronger than his subjects.¹²¹ By deduction, for the international community to be in good order, there must be a strong China and weaker non-Chinese who were deemed “outer subjects” to the Son of Heaven. Any foreign policy would be deemed irrational if it called for commitment of China’s resources and manpower to extensive involvement with foreign countries since that policy would inevitably weaken China.

In 633, Wei Zheng used the same analogy in his memorial to the court. “Those who want a tree to grow must deepen its roots; those who wish a river to run a long course must dredge its source. A ruler who cares about the stability of his country must accumulate virtuous and righteous deeds.” Implementation of an adventurous foreign policy was thus an action akin to “damaging the roots of a tree while hoping for it to be luxuriant.”¹²² In his own article, titled “The Golden Mirror” (“Jin jing” 金鏡), Taizong reflected on his own governance and remarked: “Within the four oceans, all lands are king’s territories. But the remote soils are the branches and leaves, and the metropolitan area is the roots.” To further elaborate his observation of the Chinese-barbarian relationship, he went on to use an ancient Chinese saying: “With the skin (China) gone, where can the hair (foreigners) attach itself?” While acknowledging the importance of “strengthening the fundamental items and deepening the roots,” Taizong was equally concerned that the branches and leaves might “fall off and no longer exist.” He confessed that proper management of these issues was what worried him deeply.¹²³

Similar to the “trunk-branch” analogy was the metaphor of “hand scabies and chest ulcer,” which compared China’s border conflicts with neighbors to itching scabies on a person’s hand. Although uncomfortable, scabies would cause no serious health problem, and a scratch should sufficiently alleviate the discomfort. China’s pressing domestic problems, however, were like an ulcer on a person’s chest. If not taken seriously, it might grow larger and threaten his well-being. Cauterizing was needed to remove this malignancy.¹²⁴

In the minds of some Tang officials, China was like a human body, with the two capitals of Chang’an and Luoyang being the heart and

¹²⁰ *JTS* 62, p. 2388; *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6081. On a separate occasion in 639, Taizong also used the same analogy; see *ZZTJ* 195, p. 6149.

¹²¹ *JTS* 128, p. 3587.

¹²² *JTS* 71, p. 2551.

¹²³ *QJW* 10, p. 51.

¹²⁴ *JTS* 195, p. 5216.

the abdomen respectively, and the four frontiers the hands and feet. Foreign countries not immediately bordering China were not part of the body, and were thus external to the Central Kingdom.¹²⁵ Using force against those countries was unnecessary. Instead, the Tang court should accord them superficial treatment 虛外, but handle China's domestic issues with substantive measures 實內.¹²⁶ Not surprisingly, Wei Zheng, Li Yanshou 李延壽, and Chu Suiliang were the major advocates of this policy.¹²⁷

Thus, the "loose rein" policy tapped into deeper, traditional ideas, such as the state as political "body," and ancient ideals that valued domestic stability over external meddling. All of this bears on the question of just how far Tang policy was actually bound to Confucian notions of virtue and righteousness.

"VIRTUE" AND "RIGHTEOUSNESS" AS "EFFICACY" AND "APPROPRIATENESS"

The Tang court often claimed that the goal of its foreign policy was the spread of virtue and righteousness to foreign lands. And the unprecedented diplomatic achievements of the Tang were due to its employment of virtue and righteousness as the code of state conduct. As soon as he ascended the throne in 627, Taizong announced: "Although I have conquered the world by military action, I should, in the end, pacify this world by civil virtue."¹²⁸ In his edict of 636 to pardon the rebellious Tuyuhun, Taizong proclaimed: "Conciliating remote countries by civil virtue is a grand rule of the sages; reviving extinguished states and restoring family lines that have been broken is a general instruction from the most benevolent rulers."¹²⁹ And in "The Golden Mirror" he wrote: "Civil virtue must be employed to govern people."¹³⁰

Taizong's words coated his foreign policy with a moralistic glow. However, whether the Tang court did indeed conduct its external relations according to such abstract and moralistic principles as virtue and righteousness remains a question. The court, for one thing, embraced "virtue" only after successful military campaigns in the northeast, the north, and the northwest. And implementation of the principles in question seemed to have been feasible only when China was in a position of power, dealing with weaker and friendly countries. Moreover, time

¹²⁵ *JTS* 80, p. 2734, p. 2737; *ZZTJ* 196, p. 6178; Xie, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao*, p. 507.

¹²⁶ *JTS* 80, p. 2733.

¹²⁷ *ZZTJ* 197, pp. 6200-1.

¹²⁸ *JTS* 28, p. 1045.

¹²⁹ *TDZLJ* 129, p. 642; *ZZTJ* 194, p. 6119.

¹³⁰ *QIW* 10, p. 50.

and again China had to use force to fend off threats from hostile neighbors.¹³¹ In such situations, neither virtue nor righteousness was of much help. Worse still, Chinese rulers had to appeal for foreign support or protection when the Middle Kingdom was weak, internally divided, or threatened by hostile forces. The ever-changing balance of real power in Central and East Asia, and the stubborn insistence of Tang officials on guiding diplomacy by virtue and righteousness offer an intriguing contrast, which should lead to a reconsideration of the meaning of virtue and righteousness in Tang diplomacy. We need to step aside from the overall argument in order to examine these two traditional words in specific context and in translation.

Virtue, pronounced *de* in Chinese, is generally understood as the good, ethical nature of man, which manifests itself in admirable conduct. “Virtue” is a proper rendition of *de* when it is meant to signify good moral standards. The term *jide* 吉德 is an example in point. It is associated with such good conduct as filial reverence and loyal faith. *De* also comes to bear in contexts dealing with emperors, and then has the sense of a ruler who is humane, suasive, and wise. In 632, Wei Zheng lectured Taizong to the effect that he would be deemed a ruler of superior virtue 德之上 if he “burnt the precious robes in the imperial warehouse, tore down the grand halls in the Efang Palace 阿房宮, feared the peril of living in magnificent buildings, and thought rather of living comfortably in a humble place.” Wei believed this because such exemplary, austere conduct would manifest “the silent transforming influence of the deities, and (as a result) China will be well governed without action.”¹³² In Wei’s view, however, Taizong would be considered a ruler of a lower grade of virtue (*de zhi ci* 德之次), if he simply lived in modesty, or a ruler of poor character (*de zhi xia* 德之下), if he flaunted extravagance.¹³³ More importantly, in this specific context of “imperial morals,” a benevolent ruler must transmit the virtues of Heaven to the human realm,¹³⁴ and manifest his intrinsic virtue through efficacious policies.¹³⁵ Implementation of these policies required a ruler of extraordinary qualities, which, once again, are referred to as *de* in early writings and were collectively known as the “nine qualities” (*jiude* 九德) in Chinese:

¹³¹ *JTS* 198, p. 5371. ¹³² *JTS* 71, p. 2550; Xie, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao*, p. 17.

¹³³ *JTS* 71, p. 2551. *De* could even be related to theft (*xiongde* 兇德), villainy, harboring a thief, and accepting the gifts of a traitor. See *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* (SSJZS edn.) 20, p. 1861; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 5, p. 282. For *xiongde*, see also *Shang shu zhengyi* (SSJZS edn.) 9, p. 172.

¹³⁴ *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* 5, p. 1741.

¹³⁵ *Zhou yi zhengyi* 周易正義 (SSJZS edn.) 8, p. 86.

1. the power of judgment by means of determining what is right (*du* 度);
2. silent exertion by means of making people respond to his virtue (*mo* 莫);
3. illumination by extending a bright influence over all quarters (*ming* 明);
4. earnest beneficence without selfish partiality (*lei* 類);
5. leadership by teaching people without becoming weary (*zhang* 長);
6. rule by making people happy and awed with rewards and punishment (*jun* 君);
7. submission by treating people with gentleness and harmony (*shun* 順);
8. cordial union with courtiers by choosing what is good and following it (*bi* 比); and
9. accomplishment by achieving order between Heaven and Earth (*wen* 文).¹³⁶

If a ruler acquired these remarkable qualities, then in order to govern the Chinese and the non-Chinese he would be able to use moral, civil, and military means properly. In this political setting, efficacy was the essence of *de*, and as a guiding principle it became a good fit for the early-Tang and its handling of domestic and foreign issues. Li Yan-shou once summarized the role of *de* in foreign policy: “The barbarians would send their envoys to us if we practice *de*; they would rebel against us if we do not.”¹³⁷

There is yet another context for *de* in policy debates, where it often means “getting things into proper arrangement 得事宜也,” thus becoming linked to the related word “to get” (also pronounced *de*).¹³⁸ The notion was that rulers and statesmen could achieve desired goals by using the power of *de* to handle things properly and to motivate others, with or without exerting physical force.¹³⁹ An edict of 639, for example,

¹³⁶ *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* 52, p. 2119; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 5, p. 727. The term *jiude* could also refer to different sets of capacity and moral characters; see Kong Chao 孔晃, *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 (SBCK edn.) 1, p. 6a, 4, p. 5b; *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* 19a, p. 1846.

¹³⁷ Li, *Bei shi* 96, p. 3196; also idem, *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975) 79, p. 1987. Fang Xuanling had a similar opinion on this issue; *THY* 99, pp. 1775–76.

¹³⁸ *Li ji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (SSJZS edn.) 37, p. 1528; *Lun yu zhushu* 論語注疏 (SSJZS edn.) 2, p. 2461; *Shi ming* 釋名 (SBCK edn.) 4, p. 25a. The ultimate goal of *de* was to achieve “goodness of government, and the government is tested by its nourishing of the people”; *Shang shu zhengyi* (SSJZS edn.) 4, p. 125; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 1, pp. 55–56. The British Museum and Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris each preserves a hand-written copy of *Baixing zhang* 百行章, a Tang-dynasty work by Du Zhenglun 杜正倫. In chapters 1 and 16, the character 德 was replaced with 得. See Lin Congming 林聰明, *Tang Du Zhenglun jiqi Baixing zhang* 唐杜正倫及其百行章 (Taiwan: Dongwu daxue Zhongguo wenxue yanjiusuo, 1979), pp. 53–54, p. 75; Fukui Kōjun 福井康順, “Hyakkō shō ni tsuite no sho mondai” 百行章についての諸問題, *TS* 13–14 (1958), pp. 1–23.

¹³⁹ Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1934), pp. 31–32; A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), p. 13; David S. Nivison, “Royal Virtue in Shang Oracle Inscriptions,” *EC* 4 (1978–79), pp. 52–55.

employed the term to justify the Tang expedition against Gaochang: “By appointing generals and dispatching war carriages, an emperor acquires the power of quelling rebellions 定亂之德.”¹⁴⁰ In policy discussions, the meaning of *de* is therefore better communicated in English as “in the virtue of,” efficacy, or power.¹⁴¹

This section has posed a frequently associated word, namely, *yi* 義, which is conventionally translated as “righteousness.” In Tang diplomatic vocabulary, however, *yi* was not as moralistic as the English term righteousness would imply. The term was synonymous with efficacy and was cognate with “appropriateness” and “fitting,” both are also glossed as *yi* 宜 in Chinese commentaries.¹⁴² The gist of *yi* was the appropriateness of an action taken in a specific situation.¹⁴³ An appropriate action was one fitting to the situation and to one’s status.¹⁴⁴ And no universal moral judgment was to be passed on actions taken by people or the state.¹⁴⁵ A Tang military campaign against another country, for instance, could be considered appropriate,¹⁴⁶ if this country was a vassal state that refused to fulfill its obligations to China, if it harassed Chinese borders, or if it had long been an enemy to China.¹⁴⁷

In fact, “appropriateness” had been a chief policy concern ever since antiquity.¹⁴⁸ Foreign policies based on efficacy and appropriateness (*de* and *yi*) were regarded as the “root of all advantage,”¹⁴⁹ since they could accommodate not only the state’s interests but also bring benefit to all parties.¹⁵⁰ Appropriateness in policy-making was the ability of a ruler to handle a situation according to its relevant details and

¹⁴⁰ *TDZLJ* 130, p. 643.

¹⁴¹ Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1938), p. 33; Jay Sailey, “A.C. Graham’s *Disputers of the Tao* and Some Recent Works in English on Chinese Thought,” *JAS* 112.1 (1992), pp. 36–41.

¹⁴² *Li ji zhengyi* (SSJZS edn.) 48, p. 1598; 52, p. 1629; *Guo yu* 3, p. 1b; 7, p. 5a; Jia Changchao 賈昌朝, *Qunjing yinbian* 群經音辯 (SBCK edn.) 5, p. 7b.

¹⁴³ Ma Qichang 馬其昶, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986), p. 13.

¹⁴⁴ *Guanzi* 管子 (SBCK edition) 13, p. 3a; *Huainan zi* 淮南子 (SBCK edition) 9, p. 13b; *Shuo-wen jiezi* 說文解字 (SBCK edn.) 12b, p. 6b; Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, pp. 11, 45.

¹⁴⁵ Even murder, usually considered a capital crime in Chinese society, can be justified if a person killed a perpetrator who had humiliated his parents, brothers, or elders. See *Zhou li zhushu* 周禮注疏 (SSJZS edn.) 14, p. 732.

¹⁴⁶ *TDZLJ* 130, p. 645.

¹⁴⁷ *JTS* 66, p. 2466.

¹⁴⁸ *Li ji zhengyi* 12, p. 1338; Ban Gu, *Han shu* 52, p. 2400; *Hou Han shu* 89, p. 2946; *XTS* 215, p. 6037; *ZZTJ* 193, pp. 6075–76; 194, p. 6117.

¹⁴⁹ *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* 16, p. 1822.

¹⁵⁰ For the multi-layered meaning of *yi* when found in conjunction with *li*, see e.g., “利義之和也,” “義利之本也,” “以義生利,” “以義爲利,” and “以義建利.” See *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* 25, p. 1894; 28, p. 1917; 30, p. 1942; 45, p. 2059; 51, p. 2107. See also *Guo yu* 2, p. 2a; 3, p. 3b; 7, p. 7a; 8, p. 9b; *Zhou yi zhengyi* 1, p. 15, and *Li ji zhengyi* 60, p. 1675.

in so doing also promote the people's well-being.¹⁵¹ For instance, he should allow people accustomed to chilly weather to live in the north, and those who could endure heat to remain in the tropics.¹⁵² And he should try to influence foreign peoples rather than mandate that they change their customs; improve local administration rather than mandating a change in local practices.¹⁵³ Taizong referred to this ability as "following what people desire" and "promoting appropriateness" (*dunyi* 敦義).¹⁵⁴

The pursuit of efficacy and appropriateness in diplomacy had to be anchored in the understanding of the non-Chinese and their way of life. Tang China's neighbors were mostly nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes who migrated according to changes in the season to seek water and pasture for their herds. Their nomadic way of life usually did not lead to extensive contacts with the sedentary Chinese, except for occasional trading of herds for Chinese products. Situations, however, would drastically change when forces beyond the control of the nomads interrupted their cycle of life. Drought and snowstorms would drastically reduce the number of cattle on which nomads' livelihood depended, forcing them to look for food by raiding Chinese border towns. Violent power struggles within a tribal confederation and wars against other tribes would also send defeated nomadic peoples fleeing for protection in the Middle Kingdom.¹⁵⁵ An interlocking relationship between China and its neighbors was thus formed and was to last throughout the Tang dynasty.

Tang rulers and courtiers understood this interlocking relationship reasonably well. Although they often used pejorative language to degrade foreigners as necessary evils, they had some knowledge of their languages, desires, and attitudes toward China. Tang courtiers realized that foreigners, especially those whose territories bordered upon China, had intimately associated with China ever since remote antiquity. They had been influenced by the virtues of the sage kings and had been part of China's defenses.¹⁵⁶ Foreigners in the north and

¹⁵¹ *Shi ming* 4, p. 25a; *Li ji zhengyi* 48, p. 1598; 52, p. 1629; *Shang shu zhengyi* 8, p. 161.

¹⁵² *Li ji zhengyi* 12, p. 1338. His orders to the people must also not interrupt the agricultural work of the season; see *Lun yu zhushu* 5, p. 2474.

¹⁵³ *Li ji zhengyi* 12, p. 1338.

¹⁵⁴ *QTW* 8, p. 39. Taizong also used this idea to judge foreign rulers' actions. He praised the Tölüş qaghan for having pledged loyalty to the Tang when natural disasters and famine devastated the northern steppe. This enabled the Turkish leader to "turn a misfortune into blessing," and was thus "an appropriate and truly commendable action 厥義可嘉"; *ibid.* 4, p. 15.

¹⁵⁵ Du Qin 杜欽, a Han-dynasty official, compared the barbarians to "the reverse side of China 中國之陰"; *Han shu* 60, p. 2671.

¹⁵⁶ *Chungiu Zuoshi zhuan* 50, p. 2103.

west, however, became hostile to China when internal political chaos had weakened the authority of the Chinese kings; whereas those in the south and east remained harmless.¹⁵⁷ The difference in their attitude toward the Middle Kingdom was due not just to the relative military strength of individual tribes, but more to the unique disposition of each barbarian group that was shaped by their homeland and was not easily changed.¹⁵⁸ China could never avoid contacts with the non-Chinese. They would always be part of the Chinese way of life; and the differently situated and culturally varied nomadic groups (or states) would challenge or retreat from China's border areas depending on the situation. Thus a certain fluidity was called for.

When the balance of power was in favor of China, the Tang court would have more options in conducting its external relations. The Tang emperors and courtiers would ponder and debate what the proper arrangements for foreigners should be. Interestingly, Xu Hui 徐惠, a favorite and precociously gifted concubine of Taizong, summed up in 648 the complex correlation between the domestic and foreign policies, and its implication to the fate of China: "Territorial expansion brings no eternal peace to China," wrote she in a memorial to her master, "Policies that easily overburden the people are often the root cause for domestic upheaval."¹⁵⁹ Wei Zheng was of the same opinion. Using the Sui dynasty as example, he lectured Taizong that the fall of this powerful dynasty was due mainly to its overtly ambitious but ill-conceived policies at home and abroad. The rash actions 動 of the Sui court had caused its demise. The Tang court's restraint from such actions, in contrast, was leading the country to internal stabilization.¹⁶⁰ The prudent Tang ministers therefore took as their responsibility to advise their master not to act on impulse. Wei Zheng was one of them. In fact, he came up with the notion of "ten thoughts 十思" that Taizong might use to fend off imprudent actions. They emphasize amelioration in relations and personal frugality and humility, for example, keeping an empty, undisturbed mind, so as to accept suggestions from inferiors, and granting no undue reward out of kindness 無因喜以繆賞.¹⁶¹ Such sensible thoughts won praise from the empress. She commended Wei Zheng as an outspoken remonstrator, "an honest man of profound concern for the fate of the country, and one who has used appropriateness 義 to persuade his master not to act on impulse 情."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ *Guo yu* (SBCK edn.) 16, p. 1a-b.

¹⁵⁸ *Li ji zhengyi* (SSJZS edn.) 12, p. 1338; *JTS* 199b, p. 5364.

¹⁵⁹ *JTS* 51, p. 2168.

¹⁶⁰ *JTS* 71, p. 2554; Xie, *Zhenguan zhengyao jijiao*, p. 441.

¹⁶¹ *JTS* 71, p. 2552.

¹⁶² *JTS* 51, p. 2165.

Tang officials believed that maintaining harmonious relations with neighboring countries by exercising caution and restraint in diplomacy was in the best interest of China. This notion could be traced back to the statesmen of Jin 晉 (a regional state located in present-day central Shanxi province) during the Spring and Autumn period (770–403 BC). They had concluded that maintaining harmony with the western and northern non-Chinese (known as the Rong 戎 and Di 狄, respectively) was “the happy destiny of the state 和夷狄國之福也.”¹⁶³ They had pointed to five mutual advantages in pursuing such a policy:

The Rong and Di continually change their residence, and are fond of exchanging land for goods. Their lands can be purchased; this is the first advantage. Our borders will not be kept in apprehension. The people can labor on their fields, and the husbandmen complete their toils; this is the second. When the Rong and Di serve Jin, our neighbors all around will be terrified, and the states will be awed and cherish our friendship; this is the third. Tranquilizing the Rong by our goodness, our armies will not be exhausted, and weapons will not be broken; this is the fourth. . . . Using only measures of virtue, the remote will come to us, and the near will be at rest; this is the fifth.¹⁶⁴

Pursuit of these five mutual advantages was to become the basic concern in Chinese diplomatic thinking of later times: China should satisfy the material needs of its nomadic neighbors in exchange for secured borders so that Chinese farmers could attend to their fields; China should maintain friendly relations with other countries so as to avoid using force in external affairs; China should appease its neighbors near and far by interchange of mutual benefits, and China, when in political disunity, should forge amicable links with its powerful nomadic neighbors so as to strengthen its own position.

To properly nurture the non-Chinese (*xu zhi* 蓄之),¹⁶⁵ China had to comprehend their aspirations and needs, which concerned trade, marriage alliances, and sometimes a vassal-lord relationship with China. Based on this understanding, Tang officials developed diplomatic thinking in which a correlation existed among several key stances, those being mutual self-interest, appropriateness, efficacy, virtue, and righteousness. These Tang utilitarian policy makers were concerned mainly with what a Tang foreign policy would produce for China. But they

¹⁶³ *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* 31, p. 1951; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 5, p. 453.

¹⁶⁴ *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* 29, p. 1933; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 5, p. 424.

¹⁶⁵ *JTS* 66, p. 2466.

also realized that for the sake of peaceful relations with neighboring countries, Chinese diplomacy must produce results desirable to all concerned parties, since the real interest of China rested in the realization of the mutual self-interests of the member states in the international community. Moreover, acting on mutual self-interest in diplomacy was itself a moral conduct. It accommodated the self-interest of China to that of the concerned countries, and was therefore a virtuous, righteous, and appropriate state behavior. To Tang officials, virtue, righteousness and self-interest were not diametrically opposed values in diplomatic thinking. Through implementing appropriate policies, they could make these values complementary rather than opposed to each other.

The Ancient Idea of de and yi as Complementary

That Tang officials used *de* and *yi* in both moral and utilitarian senses was indeed a remarkable example of dialectical thinking. To them, the terms virtue and righteousness applied to diplomacy were not empty statements of ideology or of moral principle. They were practical means for pursuing self-interest and the mutual self-interest of the involved parties. This way of thinking, however, was not a Tang mental invention. It drew on the rich Chinese intellectual traditions of the Warring States period (475–221 BC), which acknowledged a close association between the moral principles of virtue and righteousness, and the human desire for self-interest.¹⁶⁶

Both Confucius (551–479 BC) and Mencius (372–289 BC) targeted the relentless pursuit of self-interest, power, and wealth by local rulers as the root cause of China's problems. They attempted to use virtue and righteousness as restraints to the impulse of selfishness, and regarded virtue and righteousness as the absolute principles of their moral system.¹⁶⁷ As a philosopher, Confucius argued strongly against the inclusion of any concern for benefit in the foundation of his moral system in order to maintain its purity.¹⁶⁸ But he was also a reformer concerned with contemporary issues and determined to use his teaching to transform China. Mencius once spoke of Confucius as

¹⁶⁶ For discussions of the relationship between righteousness and benefit, see Hou Jiaju 侯家駒, "Mengzi yi li zhi bian de hanyi yu shikong beijing" 孟子義利之辨的涵義與時空背景, *Kong Meng yuekan* 孔孟月刊 23.9 (1985), pp. 29–33; Zhang Shoujun 張守軍 and Feng Yu 馮郁, "Rujia xian yi hou li sixiang jiqi xianshi yiyi de zai renshi" 儒家先義後利思想及其現實意義的再認識, *Qilu xuekan* 齊魯學刊 5 (1995), pp. 28–35.

¹⁶⁷ *Lun yu zhushu* 2, p. 1463; 7, p. 1481; 12, p. 2504; 17, p. 2526.

¹⁶⁸ Confucius once said: "The mind of the superior man is conversant with righteousness; the mind of the mean man is conversant with gain"; *Lunyu zhushu* 4, p. 2471; trans. Legge, *Chinese Classics* 1, p. 170.

“a sage whose acts display timeliness 聖之時者.”¹⁶⁹ Confucius recognized the desire for benefit as a part of human nature.¹⁷⁰ He saw it as the responsibility of a ruler to bring prosperity to the ruled.¹⁷¹ In the meantime, he also wanted people to satisfy their desire for benefit in a morally appropriate and righteous way.¹⁷² He admonished people against selfish conduct, and warned them of the negative consequence of such conduct.¹⁷³ Using his moral thinking to address people’s desire for benefit, Confucius urged them to think of righteousness when seeing things beneficial, and to obtain benefit only when so doing was consistent with righteousness.¹⁷⁴

Confucian teachings, thus, clearly had both intrinsic and extrinsic values: in their emphasis on virtue and righteousness as the fundamental principles for morality, and in their efficacy in addressing and accommodating the varied and sometimes conflicting interest of peoples and states. And this held true in the so-called schools that surrounded and descended from Confucius’ own. For example, Mencius was equally concerned with the morally appropriate way whereby local rulers could bring about benefit to their countries.¹⁷⁵ A country would prosper if its ruler, the ministers, and the people all cherished and acted upon the principle of righteousness.¹⁷⁶

Righteousness and benefit were conceived still differently in the teachings of Mozi 墨子 (470–391 BC?) and his followers.¹⁷⁷ The school’s particularly utilitarian approach regarded loyalty, filial piety, virtue, and righteousness as means to bring about benefit.¹⁷⁸ Benefits to the country and people were the ultimate standard by which to judge all

¹⁶⁹ *Mengzi zhushu* 孟子注疏 (SSJZS edn.) 10/A, p. 2741.

¹⁷⁰ *Lunyu zhushu* 4, p. 2471; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 1, p. 166: “Riches and honours are what men desire.”

¹⁷¹ *Lunyu zhushu* 13, p. 2507.

¹⁷² Confucius strongly condemned those who acquired “riches and honors by unrighteousness”; *Lunyu zhushu* 7, p. 2482; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 1, p. 200.

¹⁷³ *Lun yu zhushu* 4, p. 2471; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 1, p. 169: “He who acts with a constant view to his own advantage will be much murmured against.” See also *Lun yu zhushu* 13, p. 2507; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 1, p. 270: “Looking at small advantages prevents a great affair from being accomplished.”

¹⁷⁴ *Lunyu zhushu* 14, p. 2511; 16, p. 2522; 19, p. 2531.

¹⁷⁵ He once advised the king of Liang (capital in present-day Kaifeng) not to make the pursuit of benefit his only and openly acknowledged aim in domestic and foreign affairs since doing so would be both morally incorrect and politically imprudent, and would evoke resentment from other local rulers and bring disadvantages to one’s own state; see *Mengzi zhushu* 1/A, p. 2665; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 2, p. 126.

¹⁷⁶ *Mengzi zhushu* 12/A, p. 2756.

¹⁷⁷ *Mozi* 墨子 (SBCK edn.) 10, p. 21A.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 10, pp. 1b–2a: “loyalty would benefit the sovereign; filial piety would benefit the parents.”

values,¹⁷⁹ and any sensible policy would thus bring about benefit to the country. At the same time, the approach of the Mohists was also uniquely universalistic, since in their philosophy benefit referred not to the self-interest of an individual or one country, but to the collective interest of all people in a country, or even all countries; this was known as “mutual benefit” (*xiangli* 相利),¹⁸⁰ a concept that originated from another well-known Mohist idea, namely, “universal mutual love” (*jian'ai* 兼愛). If one acted on the principles of mutual benefit and universal mutual love, his behavior would then be a manifestation of virtue and righteousness: this had been the way of the ancient sage kings.¹⁸¹ Mozi essentially agreed with Confucius and Mencius that self-interest should be handled in accordance with righteousness.

Xunzi's 荀子 (fl. 298–238 BC) teaching also established a certain unity of the concepts. Here, righteousness was no longer an abstract and absolute moral principle, but an ideological means to realize one's fundamental interest in a rapidly changing society. Xunzi elaborated an important value: the desire for benefit and preference for righteousness were both inborn in human nature. The sage kings did not attempt to remove such desires, but would educate people to recognize their innate preference for righteousness,¹⁸² which would support their own fundamental interests. Xunzi stated: “Those who subordinate pursuit of interest to consideration of righteousness will thrive. And those who let benefit precede righteousness will disgrace themselves.”¹⁸³ To Xunzi, moral values (benevolence, righteousness, and the like) brought personal and social order.¹⁸⁴

This long intellectual tradition, which posited an accommodating relationship between morality and self-interest, manifested itself in early-Tang diplomacy. The latter emphasized policies that were appropriate to their specific situation, as well as reciprocity for all the countries concerned and a balance between striving for national interest and due consideration for virtue and righteousness. While the Tang court often justified its international behavior by reference to Confucian morality, the final justification was in fact based on a careful assessment of mutual self-interest and appropriateness. It is easy to see that it did

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 9, p. 2a.

¹⁸⁰ *Mozi* 1, p. 8b; 9, p. 3b; 4, pp. 4a-b, 8a: “They ought to practice universal mutual love and the interchange of mutual benefits. This was the law of the sage beings; it is the way to effect the good government of the nations; it may not but be striven after”; trans. Legge, *Chinese Classics* 2, p. 107. See also *ibid* 4, p. 13b.

¹⁸¹ *Mozi* 4, p. 13b.

¹⁸² *Xunzi* 荀子 (SBCK edn.) 19, pp. 13b-14a.

¹⁸³ Ibid. 2, p. 14a.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 17a.

not always lead China to cultivate friendly relations. This was hardly surprising, since neither Gaozu nor Taizong was a dogmatic pacifist or a devoted Confucian moralist. They were instead shrewd pragmatists willing to use whatever means they saw fit to tackle complex international issues and unpredictable crises. Moreover, as Sons of Heaven, they could decide what constituted appropriate international behavior for China, and what course of action was in the best interest of both China and its neighbors.

FROM A RECEPTIVE EMPEROR TO A RULER OF HIS OWN WAY

Taizong, who had ascended the throne by having his younger brother killed in a coup d'état and forcing his father to abdicate, was mindful of consolidating power at home and avoiding overextended foreign policy at the beginning of his reign. He told his ministers early in 628: "People say that the Son of Heaven is the highest sovereign and is thus afraid of nothing. I disagree. I fear Heaven who supervises me, and the ministers who look up to me. Cautious and attentive [in discharging my duties], I am still afraid of my failing to act on Heaven's will and to live up to people's expectations." Wei Zheng rejoiced at his master's thoughts: "This is indeed the gist of achieving good governance. I wish your majesty could always think so."¹⁸⁵

Taizong was also willing to consult his ministers. In 629, he instructed them to recruit virtuous and honest people into the government, and urged them to dispute any inappropriate policy. "Recently, [officials from the Secretariat and the Chancellery] always obey me," the emperor quipped, "I have not heard any differing opinion from them. But if the only thing they know is handling daily routines, which anyone can do, why do we need talented people [in the government]?"¹⁸⁶ Two years later, in 631 when the Turks had been subjugated, Taizong again told his ministers: "Now China has luckily settled into peace and the barbarians have submitted to us. [This situation] is indeed rare since olden times. Yet, I am on my toes everyday for fear that [the status quo] will not last. My chamberlains, I do wish to hear your remonstrations." Taizong's eagerness for different opinions delighted Wei Zheng. He told the emperor: "Peace within and without China does not delight your subject, but your majesty's vigilance in peace time does." In the same year Taizong reiterated: "I am always fearful that my changing moods

¹⁸⁵ *ZZTJ* 192, p. 6048.

¹⁸⁶ *ZZTJ* 193, pp. 6063-64.

might lead to an unjustifiable dispense of reward and punishment. I therefore urge you to voice your earnest admonitions.”¹⁸⁷

Only a few years into his reign, however, Taizong started to deviate from his earlier, stated caution. Disregarding strong objections, he launched expansive construction projects in 632. When Wei Zheng criticized this shift, the emperor gracefully accepted Wei’s opinion but refused to stop the projects. Tang courtiers readily noticed the emperor’s changed attitude toward spoken criticism, and many stopped disagreeing with him.¹⁸⁸ Taizong was growing impatient particularly with the outspoken Wei Zheng. About a month after the construction projects were announced, he came back from a court audience, simmering with rage at Wei, and mentioned to his empress that Wei ought to be executed. The emperor was placated in this instance.¹⁸⁹

Taizong tried to improve his treatment of chief ministers. He sometimes talked to them courteously, put on a kind countenance, and encouraged them to propose policies that would sustain his rule.¹⁹⁰ In reality, however, he was becoming irritable. He burst into rage at Huangfu Decan 皇甫德參, who had labeled the Luoyang Palace 洛陽宮 a wasteful project that had burdened the people, and thought of punishing him for slander.¹⁹¹ Taizong’s quick temper deeply worried the empress. With her health fast deteriorating, she gathered her last strength to convey several wishes, one being that the emperor should “accept admonition.”¹⁹² Unfortunately, the admonition from her deathbed fell on deaf ears. The atmosphere at the court changed for the worse, so much so that many courtiers shied away from any policy discussions. In 637, Wei Zheng aptly described Taizong’s changing attitude toward remonstrance: “At the beginning of the Zhenguan reign period, your majesty desired remonstrations by the ministers. You often admonished them to speak up. In the middle [of the reign period] you happily accepted [criticisms]. You are different now, for you only reluctantly accept [opinions differing with yours].”¹⁹³ In a last ditch effort to urge a renewal of interest in criticism, Wei Zheng even condemned Taizong in 641: “When presiding over a court audience ... you often throw temper tantrums [at the ministers] so as to cover your mistakes. What is the benefit of doing this?”¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁷ *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6091.

¹⁸⁸ *ZZTJ* 194, p. 6100.

¹⁸⁹ *ZZTJ* 194, p. 6069.

¹⁹⁰ *ZZTJ* 194, pp. 6097, 6105; *CFYG* 109, pp. 17b-18a.

¹⁹¹ *ZZTJ* 194, p. 6109.

¹⁹² *ZZTJ* 194, p. 6121.

¹⁹³ *ZZTJ* 95, pp. 6137-38.

¹⁹⁴ *ZZTJ* 196, pp. 6172, 6176.

Wei Zheng died in 642. A sorrowful Taizong compared his loyal subject to a mirror that reflected one's achievements as well as mistakes: "With the death of Wei Zheng, I lost a mirror!"¹⁹⁵ However, the emperor soon abandoned Wei's foreign policy and organized a series of military campaigns abroad: expeditions against Koguryō in 644, 647, and 648, the conquest of the Xueyantu tribe in 646, and the capture of Kucha in 648. With no due concern for the enormous cost to China, Taizong also accepted the Tiele 鉄勒 tribe (a Turkish people active in northern Xinjiang province) into the Tang system in 646. When receiving the newly submitted tribe, he showed extraordinary generosity after inquiry about their situation: "Having pledged allegiance to me, you are now safe and sound, like rats in the hole and fish in water. I wonder whether the hole and the water are big and deep enough for you. If not, I shall have the hole enlarged and the water deepened to accommodate you."¹⁹⁶

The lavish treatment accorded the Tiele had been guided by a fresh idea – that of the "Greater Tang (Da Tang 大唐)." The term described a political entity open to any foreigners willing to participate in the Chinese system, which treated foreigners, submissive or defeated, as members of an extended family. As early as 626, Taizong announced that he "regarded countries in the four seas as one family, and peoples within the [Tang] territories as his children."¹⁹⁷ Both Gaozu and Taizong saw themselves as "parents of all living mankind 蒼生父母," responsible for the well-being of all peoples.¹⁹⁸ In 630, at the request of the tribal chieftains in the "Western Region," Taizong accepted the title "Heavenly Qaghan (Tian kehan 天可汗)" to become their nominal leader.¹⁹⁹ With his ancestor and wife being of the Turkish-speaking Xianbei 鮮卑 people, this new qaghan was particularly open toward foreigners. This openness displayed itself graphically at a wine party held in 633 for Taizong's abdicated father Gaozu, during which a submitted Turkic Qaghan danced and a leader of the southern Yue 越 people presented a poem. Rejoicing over the performance, Gaozu commented: "It is truly unprecedented that the Turks and the Yue are now of the same family."²⁰⁰ Taizong shared his father's mentality. Unlike other Chinese

¹⁹⁵ *ZZTJ* 196, p. 6184.

¹⁹⁶ *XYS* 217B, p. 6139; *CFYG* 170, p. 12a. This treatment of surrendered foreign tribes had started much earlier, in 632; *ZZTJ* 194, p. 6099.

¹⁹⁷ *ZZTJ* 192, p. 6022.

¹⁹⁸ *JTS* 199B, p. 5346. Taizong was also known as the "parent of the Chinese and the barbarians" (*Huayi fumu* 華夷父母). In 629, Taizong referred to himself as "lord of the four seas" (*sihai zhizhu* 四海之主); *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6070, pp. 6088–89.

¹⁹⁹ *JTS* 3, pp. 39–40; *ZZTJ* 193, p. 6073.

²⁰⁰ *ZZTJ* 194, pp. 6103–4.

rulers who often looked down on foreigners as savage beasts and treated them as opposites,²⁰¹ Taizong believed that they too could also have a human heart.²⁰² He said in 644: “The barbarians are also human beings. Their feelings are not different from those of the Chinese. A ruler should worry about whether he has extended virtue and benefit equally to foreigners. And there is no need for him to be suspicious of them. If he has done so, the barbarians shall become members of the same family.”²⁰³ This spirit of acceptance laid the corner stone of an accommodating Tang empire and a remarkably open Tang system.

During the early Tang, Taizong understood that the creation of a Great Tang Empire did not imply that the “whole world” (*tianxia* 天下) had, or should, come under his jurisdiction of China. This was certainly the case when he announced in 627 that he had conquered the *tianxia* by force.²⁰⁴ In the vocabulary of Tang scholar-officials, the “whole world” referred to the counties, the prefectures, and the “loose rein” prefectures under the actual administrative control of the Tang court.²⁰⁵ This was so particularly when the term in question appeared in Tang legal documents.²⁰⁶ This “whole world” often evolved in scope, but always had specific boundaries during any given period. An ambitious Tang emperor and his adventurous courtiers, however, could also interpret “the whole word” as a term with cosmopolitan connotation, and use it to justify unrestrained territorial expansion. This was exactly what happened during the latter part of Taizong’s reign concerning relations with Gaochang.

On the pretext that the ruler of Gaochang had not offered tribute to Tang in recent years and had thus failed properly to fulfill the obligations of a vassal state, Taizong decided in 639 to attack Gaochang.²⁰⁷ Many officials objected to a military operation; some ar-

²⁰¹ A telling example of such dogma was the saying “If he be not of our kin, he is sure to have a different mind”; *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* 春秋左氏傳 26, p. 1901; Legge, *Chinese Classics* 5, p. 355. It was then necessary to maintain a distance from the barbarians by “keeping them out of China”; *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan* 春秋公羊傳 (SSJZS edn.) 18, p. 2297.

²⁰² *JTS* 194A, p. 5157.

²⁰³ *ZZTJ* 197, pp. 6215–16; *THY* 94, p. 1690. In his *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974) 97, p. 2550, Fang Xuanling suggested that those who followed the path of benevolence and righteousness could all be regarded as “Chinese.” Chen An 陳黯, a ninth-century scholar, held a similar opinion in his discussion of what constituted the “Chinese heart”; *QIW* 767, p. 3584.

²⁰⁴ *JTS* 28, p. 1045.

²⁰⁵ See, e.g., Chen Ziang 陳子昂 (661–702), *Chen Boyu wenji* 陳伯玉文集 (SBCK edn.) 8, pp. 18b–19b.

²⁰⁶ *THY* 40, p. 722; Wang Fangqing 王方慶, *Wei Zhenggong jian lu* 魏鄭公諫錄 (SBCK edn.) 1, pp. 4a–b.

²⁰⁷ *JTS* 198, p. 5294; *ZZTJ* 195, p. 6146.

gued that Gaochang was “an inaccessible place beyond the horizon 天界絕域, and that even if they could conquer it, they would never be able to defend it.”²⁰⁸ Taizong, however, totally ignored their objection. In an edict to the ruler of Gaochang, he announced the universality of his power: “I have received the Mandate of Heaven to govern places near and far in the whole world, and to foster people Chinese and foreign so that they will enjoy peace and tranquility.”²⁰⁹ This rhetoric of universal power was Taizong’s justification for impending military action against Gaochang, and in 640, Tang eliminated the kingdom.

Taizong’s management of relations with the Xueyantu is another case in point. In 642, Fang Xuanling advised the emperor to marry a Tang princess to the ruler of Xueyantu. Preparation for the marriage was soon underway. The marriage, however, was merely an expedient measure 便.²¹⁰ In fact, Taizong had no intention of keeping faith with Xueyantu, for he had always wanted to exterminate the tribe by force. One year later, after reassessing the situation, Taizong changed his mind. He halted preparation for the marriage and sent a signal to tribes hostile to the Xueyantu that it was time for them to act against their foe. Some Tang officials voiced objections, but Taizong derided them as “conversant with history, but ignorant of the current situation.” He told them: “Now I shall end preparation for the marriage, and reduce the level of reception (for the Xueyantu envoys). When other tribes learn that I have abandoned the Xueyantu, they will break up the Xueyantu like slicing a melon. You just remember what I have said today.”²¹¹ The Xueyantu were destroyed in 646.

One year later Taizong targeted Qiuci 龜茲 (an oasis kingdom located in present-day Kuche, Xinjiang province). To defend his decision, the emperor deviated from the conventional political wisdom of giving China priority over foreign countries in decision-making and coined new interpretations for *yi* 義 and *yi* 宜: “*Yi* 義 means to burden oneself [Tang] with bringing tranquility to others [Qiuci].” And “promoting appropriateness 敦義 implies [that the Tang court should] follow the wishes of the [Qiuci] people.” He maintained that attacking Qiuci was a timely and appropriate 時宜 decision, which would bring about permanent peace to China’s western frontiers.²¹² Another year

²⁰⁸ *XTS* 221A, p. 6221.

²⁰⁹ Luo, *Ricang hongren ben wenguan cilin jiaozheng*, p. 247. In the same edict, Taizong also claimed that he “pacifies and possesses the whole world” and that he was “fond of fostering all living kinds” irrespective of the time they became his subjects.

²¹⁰ *ZZTJ* 196, pp. 6179–80.

²¹¹ *JTS* 80, p. 2733; *ZZTJ* 197, p. 6201.

²¹² *QIW* 8, p. 39; *CFYG* 985, pp. 18a–b.

later, in 648, he again employed his new interpretations of *yi* to justify mobilization of troops for a massive campaign against Koguryō, which would eventually end in disaster.²¹³

Li Yanshou 李延壽, a contemporary of Taizong, compiled *The History of the Northern Dynasties* (*Bei shi* 北史), in which he called emperors and ministers of previous dynasties who had wasted resources to engage remote countries as “ambitious and untrammelled masters 宏放之主” and “meddlesome subjects 好事之臣,” respectively.²¹⁴ Li apparently wanted to use these examples as warnings for the emperor and for his peers at court, because to him Taizong had also become such a master. The emperor confessed in 634 that he took great pride in himself for having conquered China at only twenty-four and ascended the throne before thirty. Now he had brought the foreigners to heel.²¹⁵ In 639, he considered his achievements as having been no less than those of the First Emperor of the Qin and emperor Wu of the Western Han.²¹⁶ Taizong’s untrammelled spirit often vividly embodied itself in his writings and conversations. In “Eulogy of the Imperial Virtue” (“Huangde song” 皇德頌), he wrote about his ambition to “bring order to both the Chinese and the barbarians ... so that eight southern barbarian tribes will come to pay tribute and six northern aboriginal groups will accept our conciliation.”²¹⁷ When receiving the Tiele tribal chieftain in 646, the emperor announced: “I am now the lord of the world. I shall feed everyone, Chinese or barbarian.”²¹⁸ In 648, he even talked about conquering and transforming “people living up north, where nothing grows, into registered residents [of China].”²¹⁹

The Tang court certainly did not lack such meddlesome officials and generals. Interested primarily in winning imperial favor and gaining rank and military merit, they happily endorsed Taizong’s adventurous thinking and would approve any such policy proposal irrespective of its moral implications. Linghu Defen 令狐德芬 (583–666) was one of them, and his thinking on foreign policy would claim that: “gain and loss are in the timing; opportunity causes both good and bad outcomes. Change according to the time; act on expediency. That way, no option will be overlooked and every strategy will be the best plan.”²²⁰ Li Daliang was another. He memorialized the throne in order to justify

²¹³ *TDZLJ* 130, p. 645.

²¹⁴ *Bei shi* 97, p. 3239.

²¹⁵ *JTS* 72, p. 2567.

²¹⁶ *XTS* 221A, p. 6233.

²¹⁷ *QTW* 4, p. 15. See also a poem by Taizong in Peng Dingqiu, *Quan Tang shi* 1, p. 4.

²¹⁸ *XTS* b, p. 6139; *CFYG* 170, p. 12a.

²¹⁹ *ZZTJ* 198, p. 6253.

²²⁰ Linghu Defen, *Zhou shu* 周書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974) 50, p. 921.

utilitarianism in foreign relations: “The illuminating kings of remote antiquity transformed the Chinese by trust, but controlled the barbarians by expedient measures.”²²¹

TAIZONG’S POSTHUMOUS TITLES AS AN EVOLVING ASSESSMENT OF HIS RULE

Taizong died in 649 and left his successor, Gaozong 高宗, with a vast empire and a rich legacy of governance. To address the deeds and accomplishments of his predecessor, the new emperor conferred upon Taizong a posthumous canonization title, “Cultured Emperor (Wen huangdi 文皇帝).”²²² At first glance this may seem to have attributed to Taizong an overarching moral goodness. But we must dig deeper. In Tang-dynasty political criticism, the word *wen* had been applied to such human personal qualities as: “achieving order between Heaven and Earth 經緯天地; conversant with the Way and its power 道德博聞; industrious in study and fond of inquiry 學勤好問; kind, compassionate, and loving to people 慈惠愛民; graceful to people and in favor of ritual 憫民惠禮; and granting titles and ranks to the worthy 賜民爵位.”²²³ This sort of “culturedness” actually carried some of the sense of *de*, as in to gain proper arrangements in affairs (discussed, above). Furthermore, *huang* and *di* in the canonization title are similar words in that they describe a ruler who “pacifies the people and acts according to law 靜民則法” – “as virtuous as Heaven and earth 德象天地.”²²⁴ Taizong’s posthumous canonization thus praised mainly his political resourcefulness, his accommodation of the opinions of subordinates, and his manipulative use of ritual. To Gaozong, the achievements of his predecessor were to be found in management of both Chinese and non-Chinese, not in his personal moral excellence. The dynastic violence surrounding Taizong’s rise to the throne would in any event have mitigated the use of terms like “loyal and filial” that we encountered, above, in the context of *jide* 吉德.

In 674, Taizong became “Wenwu sheng huangdi 文武聖皇帝.” This title recognized Taizong as a powerful emperor, able to put down re-

²²¹ *JTS* 62, p. 2388. In assessing Taizong’s foreign policy, the authors of *Xin Tang shu* regarded him as the only emperor who “was able to use the Uighurs expediently, and to control them by a deliberate policy”; *XTS* 217B, p. 6151.

²²² *THY* 1, p. 2.

²²³ *Yi Zhou shu* 6, p. 5b. See also Zhang Shoujie, “Shiji zhengyi lunli 史記正義論例,” in Takikawa Sukekoto 瀧川資言 ed., *Shiji huizhu kaozheng* 史記會注考證 (rpt. Beijing: Wenxue guji kanxingshe, 1954) 1, p. 13.

²²⁴ Zhang, “Shiji zhengyi lunli” 1, p. 13.

bellion by force (*wu*), make people obey by law (*wen*), appoint the right people for the right office, publicize the merits of his subordinates, and make taxation simple (*sheng*).²²⁵ The term *wu*, however, was also a criticism for overt ambition in using force.²²⁶ Once again there was no praise of Taizong's personal moral excellence. In 749, at a century's distance, the character "great 大" appeared in his title. And finally in 754, the character "filial 孝" was finally added, but its overall impact seems to have been relatively light. In assessing Taizong via the formal system of canonization, successive Tang emperors chose not to refer to such Confucian moral standards as trustworthiness, righteousness, and loyalty. They understood that the ideology in the background of Gaozu's and Taizong's foreign policy was constructed on a very different set of moral principles. In this value system, efficacy, appropriateness, expedience, and mutual self-interest played a prominent role, not trustworthiness and honesty.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CFYG	<i>Cefu yuangui</i> 冊府元龜
JTS	<i>Jiu Tang shu</i> 舊唐書
QIW	<i>Quan Tang wen</i> 全唐文
TD	<i>Tong dian</i> 通典
TDZLJ	<i>Tang dazhaoling ji</i> 唐大詔令集
THY	<i>Tang huiyao</i> 唐會要
Wen Daya	Wen Daya 溫大雅, <i>Da Tang chuangye qijuzhu</i> 大唐創業起居注
XTS	<i>Xin Tang shu</i> 新唐書
ZZTJ	<i>Zizhi tongjian</i> 資治通鑑

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 14; *Yi Zhou shu* 6, p. 5b.