

Buddhism and the Liao Empire: The Nong'an Pagoda and the Promotion of Stability in the Northeastern Border Region



Philip Findlay

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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Abstract

The population of the Liao empire included nomadic groups, such as the ruling Khitans, and sedentary groups, like the Han. Many of the conquered inhabitants with their families were transported to work in the more remote, underpopulated parts of the empire. The cultural differences, especially in the crowded environment within the cities, such as Huanglong fu, now named Nong'an, at the northeastern edge of the Liao empire, were a potential trigger for confrontation and conflict. In addition, the Khitans imposed two divisive and different administrations throughout the empire to govern the culturally distinct sections of the population. And yet, the duration of the Liao dynasty, from 907 to 1125 A.D., exceeded that of every preceding dynasty in China apart from the Han and Tang. This dissertation draws on evidence from a wide variety of sources, including: primary and secondary literature sources; versions of a local Nong'an legend and maps of the regional relief geography; artefacts found sealed within the Nong'an pagoda and in a neighbouring pagoda; the structural features of the long-surviving Nong'an pagoda itself. This evidence indicates that there was a considerable, continuing growth in the importance of Buddhism within Liao society. In particular, for the citizens of Huanglong fu, the evidence suggests that the Nong'an pagoda fulfilled a number of stabilising roles: as a shared Buddhist religious presence; as a military lookout and signalling platform; and as a symbol of the solidity and permanence of the city.

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Maps and images

Nong'an pagoda, Nong'an, Jilin Province.

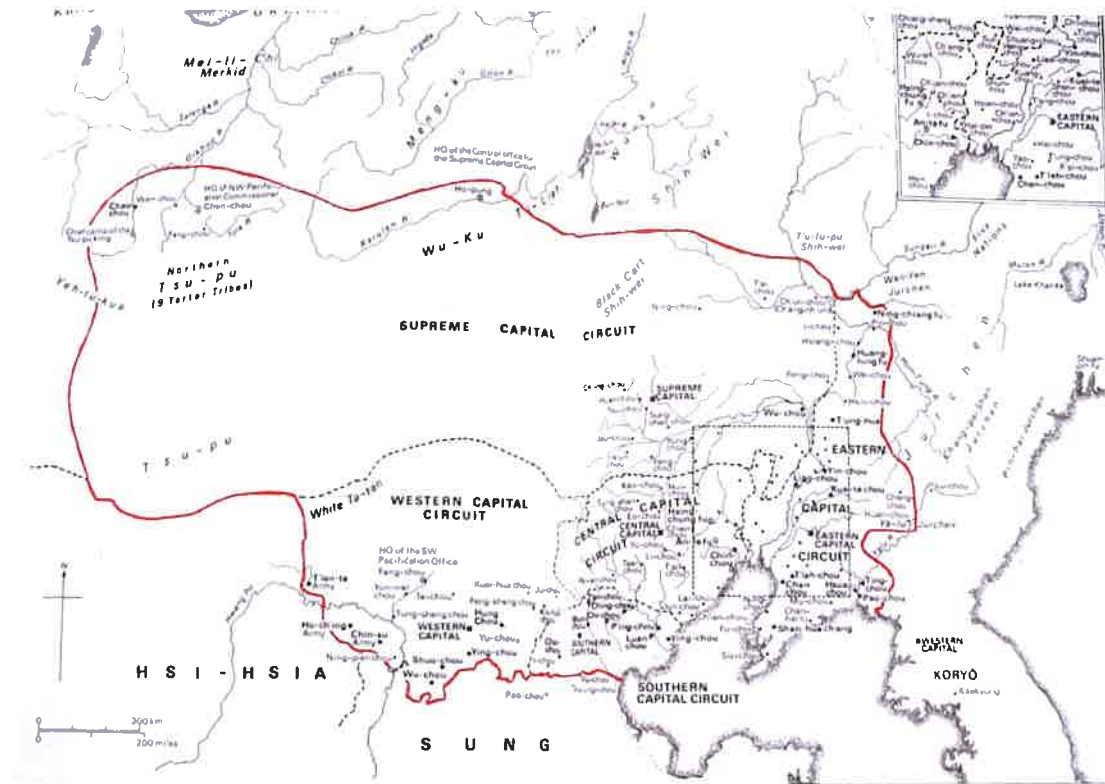
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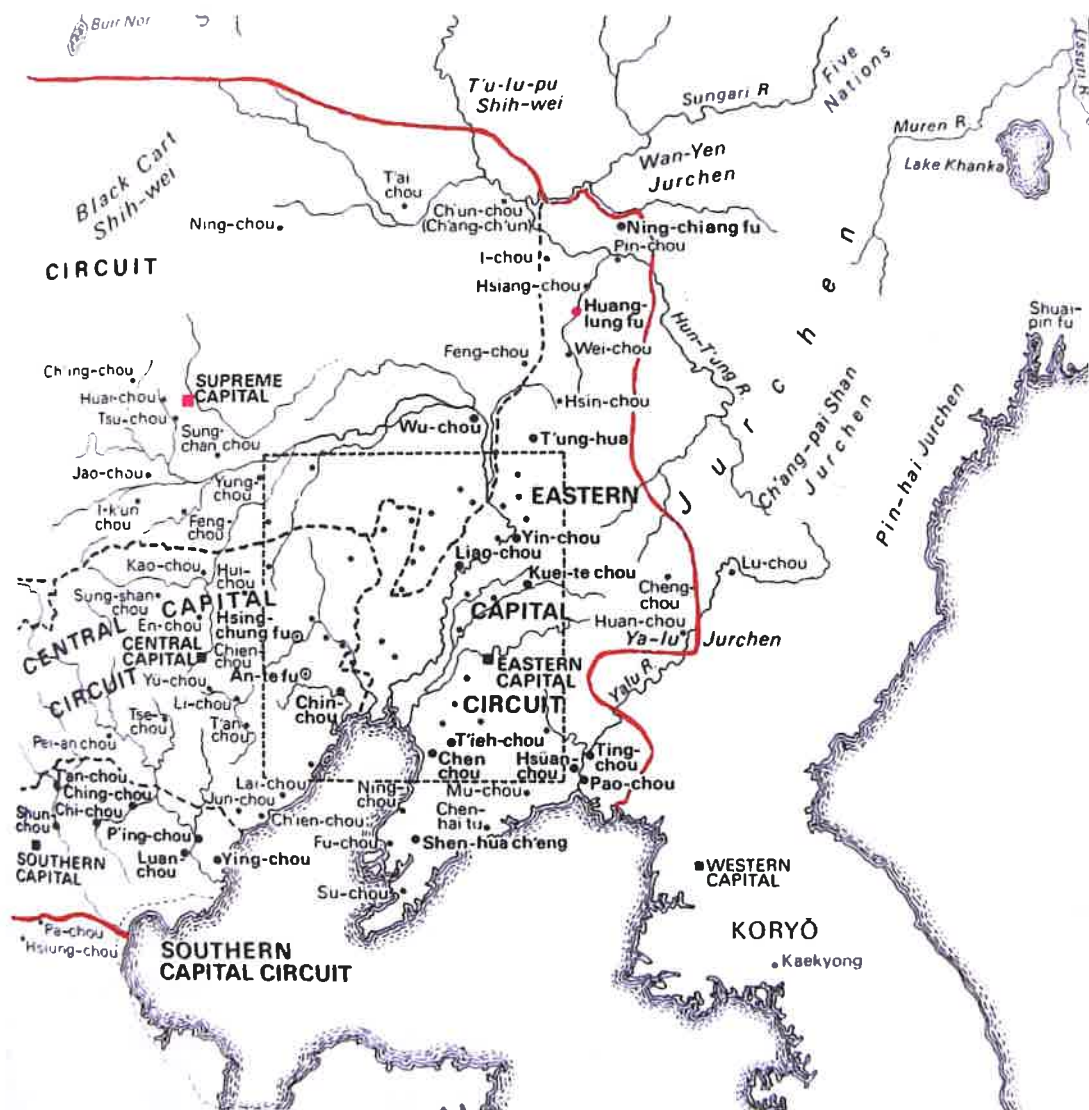
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Map 1. The Liao Empire, ca. 1045 A.D.¹



Map 2. Location of Huanglong fu (Huanglung fu) in the northeast of the Liao Empire, ca 1045 A.D.²



Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Hypotheses

Nong'an 农安镇 is a small town in the north-east of China. It sits next to the Yitong River 伊通河. On the same river, about 60 kilometres upstream to the south, lies Changchun 长春市, the capital of Jilin Province 吉林省. The tallest and oldest building in what is now the centre of Nong'an is its pagoda. This pagoda was built almost a millennium ago between 1023 and 1030 A.D.³ At that time, when much of northeast China formed the eastern part of the Liao 辽 empire, (see Map 1), Nong'an was known as Huanglong fu 黄龙府,⁴ (see Map 2). It was the most remote, north-eastern administrative centre of the Liao empire with foreign territories lying nearby, to the east and to the north. The Liao empire straddled both grain fields in the south and grasslands in the north. The rulers were the Khitans 契丹, descendants from a pastoral, nomadic people in the north. As well as the Khitans, the Liao population included descendants from the agrarian, sedentary Han 汉 population from the paddy fields in the south. There were also other sedentary populations such as the Bohai 渤海 from the kingdom of Balhae, conquered by the Khitans in 926 A.D.⁵

Throughout the Liao empire, maintaining stability, especially between the two culturally distinct populations, the sedentary and the nomadic, was a constant challenge. Mote in emphasising the scale of this challenge notes that there were differences to be accommodated even between the Khitans and other non-Khitan nomadic tribes within the Liao empire.⁶ Classifying Liao cultures as either sedentary or nomadic focuses on the most significant differences but the mixture within the Liao empire, especially within the cities, was made up of many cultures with less significant but still important distinctions. Early in the twelfth century, in the decade following the Jurchens' defeat of the Khitans, the Song envoys Xu Kangzong 许亢宗 and Zhong Bangzhi 钟邦直 noted that one consequence of the Khitans forcibly moving and resettling people during the Liao dynasty was that in Huanglong fu, Chinese was the language used as a bridge language amongst the Bohai 渤海, Tieli 铁离, Gaoli 高丽, Mohe 靺鞨, Jurchens 女真, Shiwei 室韦, Wushe 乌舍, Khitans 契丹, Uighur 回纥 and Xi 奚 people that had all finished up living there.^{7,8} At

Huanglong fu there was also the additional threat to stability from the immediate, physical presence of neighbouring foreign influences.

In Huanglong fu, the Buddhist pagoda, still a landmark presence in Nong'an today, may have contributed towards stability as a shared source of spiritual reassurance for people from all of the different cultures. Stability within the Huanglong fu region was also dependent on minimising any threat from the neighbouring foreign territories. The 44 metre high pagoda is still the highest building in that part of Nong'an.⁹ Perhaps another way in which it contributed towards stability was through military use as a look-out tower, part of an early warning system, thus helping maintain confidence and a sense of security amongst the 5000 soldiers based at Huanglong fu, and, in turn, amongst both the nomadic and sedentary populations in that region.¹⁰

This dissertation examines the possible stabilising role of Buddhism within the Liao empire and, in particular, involves the search for and the presentation of evidence to support or refute the following three hypotheses concerning the Nong'an pagoda:

- the pagoda was of religious importance for people from all of the different cultures living in Huanglong fu;
- use of the pagoda as a look-out tower helped maintain confidence in regional security at the Huanglong fu military base and, consequently, amongst the civilians;
- the investment of time and funds to build a pagoda in Huanglong fu, so close to foreign territories, was a reflection of a long-term, positive, stabilising commitment from within the Liao empire towards that region.

1.2 Sources of Evidence

In researching this dissertation, my main sources of information have been primary and secondary literature sources. I have also drawn on evidence provided by different versions of a local legend concerning the building of the Nong'an pagoda and from associated maps showing the local relief geography. Further information has been provided by the nature and age of artefacts found sealed within the Nong'an pagoda and also in the remains of a pagoda at neighbouring

Wanjintaxiang 万金塔乡. Finally, the structure and architectural features of the Nong'an pagoda itself, before it was renovated, have provided additional, important evidence for consideration.

Franke and Twitchett state that the Liao dynasty is "a particularly poorly documented period."¹¹ One reason may be difficulties associated with producing permanent records within the Liao system of government: the Emperor's royal court continued the Khitans' traditional, seasonal, nomadic life; the national government was split into an administration for the nomadic groups and a separate administration for the sedentary groups; some government information was recorded in Khitan and some in Chinese.¹² A separate reason may be that the Liao dynasty has, at times, been viewed by the Chinese as an alien regime and, consequently, has received less attention from Chinese researchers themselves than regimes that were not considered to be foreign. This creates positive feedback in which the existence of a relative profusion of sources of information for other dynasties has provided the evidence for researchers to generate even more sources of information about those dynasties.

Nong'an is located in northeast China. Some aspects of the history of the northeast of China seem to indicate almost an element of ambivalence in the commitment of China's past rulers and leaders towards the northeast region and this may be a further factor contributing to the relative lack of research into that specific region. Instances that seem to reflect this ambivalence include: Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石 initially prioritising the elimination of the Chinese Communist Party rather than the expulsion of the Japanese from the northeast during the 1930s; the Chinese agreement to lease Dalian to the Russians in 1898 and also to the occupation of Dalian by the Japanese after the Russo-Japanese War ended in 1905; support for the "Iron Blood 18-Star Flag" representing the 18 provinces of China for the national flag following the Xinhai Revolution (辛亥革命), when, as the northeast did not have provincial status, the northeast would not have "appeared" on the national flag.¹³ In contrast, the Liao dynasty, under the rule of the Khitans, seems as if it might provide evidence of an instance of a clear, definite commitment towards the northeast.

My main primary source of information about the Liao empire has been the *Liao shi* 辽史. The publication of this dynastic history was delayed and postponed

because of the issue of whether the Liao was a legitimate dynasty. The *Liao shi* was eventually completed and published in the Yuan dynasty in 1345, a delay of more than two hundred years from when the Liao dynasty ended. Such a delay, inevitably increases concern about validity and reliability issues and demands caution before drawing conclusions based on information from the *Liao shi*.

Important secondary sources providing background information as well as details about events in their sections dealing with the Liao dynasty are *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6* edited by Franke and Twitchett,¹⁴ and Mote's *Imperial China 900 – 1800*.¹⁵ The 1940s publication by Wittfogel and Feng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907 – 1125)*,¹⁶ is another helpful source providing details about everyday aspects of Liao society, not only about the lives of the Khitans and other nomadic groups but also of the traditionally sedentary populations such as the Han. These three sources provide considerable information about the events that took place, about the mixture of cultures that made up the Liao population and about details of the administration systems employed to deal with this mixture; however, the issue of the overall stability that enabled the Liao dynasty to last for such a relatively long period remains a matter of conjecture. Mote has commented that the Liao success “still defies easy explanation”.¹⁷

A secondary source that is especially helpful as it examines aspects of the growth in importance of Buddhism within the Liao empire is Steinhardt's *Liao Architecture*.¹⁸ Steinhardt focuses on the Liao timber frame buildings, funerary architecture and pagodas and relates aspects of their development to the parallel increasing importance of Buddhism to the Khitans. Whilst celebrating the Liao architecture, Steinhardt also succinctly summarises the situation, mentioned above, in which research into the Liao dynasty has been limited in comparison to other dynasties because for many Chinese the Liao dynasty was perceived as a period of foreign occupation and she also adds:

To be blunt: many of those who conducted literary or archaeological research on Northeast Asia and the Qidan harbored an innate dislike for the Liao, for North Asian peoples, or for the country in which they were engaged in research.¹⁹

This dissertation attempts to provide a small contribution towards increasing awareness of some aspects relating to the Liao dynasty. Even in Steinhardt's book, the key opening map on page 2 that shows the major sites of the Liao and Song

empires does not extend into northeast China as far as Huanglong fu. Hopefully, this dissertation might offer at least a tiny step towards getting more of northeast China “on the map”.

Chapter 2: Nomads and Farmers: The Liao Empire

2.1 The Khitans

The Khitans' traditional homeland lay on the steppes to the east of the Great Khingan Mountains.²⁰ It was in the south of this region in 918 A.D. that building commenced on the Liao empire's Supreme Capital,²¹ (see Map 2). The Khitans were nomadic herders and skilled horsemen. They moved with their herds to take advantage of the best grazing during the changing seasons; they lived in yurts not permanent buildings. They also hunted and fished and during longer stopovers grew some crops but the range of produce was very different from that grown by farmers in and amongst the grain fields to the south.²² The herds provided mutton and milk and the Khitans' diet reflected this. *Kumiss* 湏酪, fermented mare's milk, was an important staple especially for the Khitan soldiers during conflicts.²³ The animals in the herds and the hunted animals provided the wool, fleeces and furs for clothing and leather for footwear and containers.²⁴

Khitan women held considerable power and were actively involved in most social events: they could choose who they would marry and "were not confined to their quarters but joined men in activities such as drinking, singing, and dancing in public places".²⁵ For make-up, the women liked to use yellow powder on their faces, a practice known as "Buddhist cosmetic" *fo zhuang* 佛装.²⁶ A distinctive feature of the Khitan men's grooming was their hair style: Khitan men shaved the top of their heads except for a fringe above the forehead and shoulder length braids growing from above and usually hanging down in front of the ears.²⁷ A further indication of the Khitan women's status was the involvement of female as well as male shamans at major ceremonial occasions.²⁸ Cha has commented that the complete sets of equestrian equipment found in the tombs of Khitan women "testify that the Khitan women were not confined in their quarters and enjoyed outdoor activities like their male counterparts".²⁹

It was the Khitans' skill as horsemen that made them so formidable and successful as soldiers. Precautions, such as, even in times of food shortages in the south, banning the use of land near military roads for paddy fields that would require irrigation and drainage ditches, show that their cavalry was a military strength that they understood and valued.³⁰ A game similar to polo was popular both as a sport

and also as effective military training in manoeuvrability and agility on horseback. Again the Khitans were cautious about possible military implications and for long periods participation in this sport was restricted to Khitans only.³¹

2.2 The Han and the Bohai

Before being subsumed into the Liao empire, the Han and the Bohai populations had farmed in the lands to the south of the zone between the “steppe and sown”, the environmental transition band that still stretches across northern China.³² The Bohai were based in the southwest part of the Balhae empire that eventually became part of the Liao empire. The Han and Bohai lives were different from the Khitans: they lived all year in permanent buildings near the land they farmed; their clothing was made from hemp or cotton and for special occasions from silk; their staple foods were grains such as millet and rice.³³ Dairy products were not part of their diet as setting areas aside for pasture would have been inefficient use of the farmland, and, in addition, the populations were predominantly lactose intolerant.³⁴ Following the long and active interaction between the kingdom of Balhae and Tang dynasty China,³⁵ Confucian values permeated the culture of the Bohai as well as that of the Han. In particular, this meant that women, although less restricted than in the later Neo-Confucian periods, still had a less significant public role in daily life than in the Khitan culture. Cha observed in 2005 that amongst the Liao tombs of Han women that had been discovered none had contained horse-riding gear.³⁶

2.3 The Foundation of the Liao Empire

During the Tang dynasty, both the Khitans and the Han stood to benefit from an exchange or trade of the products of their different livelihoods and this took place peacefully over long periods.³⁷ The Khitans paid tribute to the Tang emperors and the Tang emperors honoured the Khitan leaders.³⁸ During these peaceful periods the Han's soft diplomacy meant that their northern communities, adjacent to the Khitan homelands, were not threatened and did not require increased military defence expenditure. When the accord broke down then Khitan plunder replaced trade. The immense strength of the Tang military forces meant that the Khitans could not capture and occupy Han settlements but the Khitan horsemen's mobility meant that few northern Han communities were safe from an attack. The occurrence over

several centuries of long, intervening periods of peaceful interaction meant that the Khitans were not unfamiliar with the structure and governmental systems employed in China.³⁹

Traditionally in China a deceased emperor's successor was the emperor's eldest son: it was accepted that the mandate of heaven continued through the generations within the same family. This principle of primogeniture both reflected and reinforced the Confucian importance attached to the family, especially parallels between a male family head and his family and a male ruler and his subjects. During the time of the Tang dynasty, amongst the Khitan tribes, the succession process was different. Every three years, their overall leader was elected from amongst all the Khitan tribal leaders.⁴⁰ It proceeded on the basis of choosing the most capable leader for the role. In 907 A.D., following numerous military successes, Abaoji, the leader of the Khitan Yila tribe, was elected as the leader of all the Khitans.⁴¹

Both the Tang empire and the kingdom of Balhae had weakened by the end of the ninth century. These two empires lay to the south of the Khitans' homelands. The Khitans were already in the process of overcoming and dominating their neighbouring nomadic tribes, the Xi 奚 to the southeast and the Shiwei 室韦 to the northwest.⁴² The Khitan raids on the south became increasingly successful. Abaoji's military victories continued and it was Abaoji who replaced the practice of electing the overall Khitan leader with the adoption of the principle of primogeniture.⁴³ The new procedure was to start on Abaoji's death, with his eldest son due to succeed him.

Academic observations about the Khitans often focus on how they maintained their own culture during the Liao dynasty, on how they remained resistant to the Han culture. Many recorded aspects do seem to support this view but Abaoji, right at the beginning of the Liao dynasty, with the decision to change the Khitan succession process to that of the Han, seems to have been one Khitan who was not resistant to sinification. A picture of a leader ambitious for personal greatness appears in the related account in the *Xin wu dai shi* 新五代史:

漢人教阿保機曰：「中國之王無代立者。」由是阿保機益以威制諸部而不肯代。⁴⁴

The Chinese told A-pao-chi that there was no case of a Chinese ruler being replaced on the throne. Thereupon A-pao-chi made increasing use of his power to control the tribes and refused to be replaced.⁴⁵

By 925 A.D., Khitan forces, led by Abaoji and his second son Yaogu, had extended the Khitan-controlled empire to the north into northern Mongolia and to the west into regions still controlled by Tuyuhun nomads.⁴⁶ In 926 A.D., Abaoji took his forces to the east and attacked the formidable kingdom of Balhae that occupied much of what is now Northeast China. Once the confrontation began, the kingdom of Balhae that had existed for more than 200 years collapsed within a matter of weeks. The speed of this defeat seems so unexpected that some people had suggested the millennium eruption of the volcano Changbaishan (also known as Mt. Baekdu and Baitoushan), lying within the territory of Balhae, was the main cause of the collapse.⁴⁷ The date of the millennium eruption has now been determined to be 946 A.D. which indicates that the major eruption was not involved.⁴⁸ However, further research has suggested that earlier, smaller eruptions may have had a significant influence.⁴⁹ Whether the volcano was a factor or not, the rapid completion of such a major conquest reflects possession of considerable military strength and acumen by the Khitan forces. Initially, the conquered Balhae became a vassal kingdom but in 936 A.D. it was made part of the Khitan empire itself.⁵⁰

Abaoji died in 926 A.D. and was succeeded not by his eldest son but by his second son Yaogu, temple name Taizong 太宗, who was the more experienced military commander.⁵¹ It was during Taizong's reign in 938 A.D., following military help from the Khitans that had established Shi Jingtang as Emperor of the newly formed Later Jin Dynasty, that Shi Jingtang ceded sixteen prefectures from north China to the Liao empire.⁵² This was a complete transfer to the Liao empire: even the population registers were transferred.⁵³

By the end of 938 A.D., the Liao empire, founded at the beginning of Abaoji's rule, had control of all of the key regions that then remained under its rule for almost two centuries. As the Khitan military forces had moved southwards taking control, there had been mass deportations of the sedentary populations from the Han and Bohai regions to many other parts of the empire, especially to the developing cities that were the new regional centres of the Liao government.⁵⁴ The skills of the conquered people were part of the loot. The *Liao shi* reports that, in 926 A.D., amongst many thousands of households deported from the former kingdom of Balhae, 1000 were associated with the smelting of iron.⁵⁵ The Khitans

described the value of those prisoners who had artisan skills as being like a “kind of coral” 属珊瑚.⁵⁶ The sedentary populations, with their distinctly different culture, were no longer separated from the nomadic populations by the grass-grain boundary: they had been uprooted and transplanted, creating a less uniform pattern of cultures and many more edges of contact. The fact that many of those Han and Bohai, soldiers taken prisoner or people who had been living in the regions conquered by the Khitans, were now slaves, made those edges of contact sharper and more unstable.⁵⁷

2.4 Nong'an and the Northeast Border Region

Today, the population of Nong'an is much smaller than that of Changchun or Jilin 吉林市, two of the other cities in Jilin Province.⁵⁸ During the Liao dynasty, the situation was very different. Then, known as Huanglong fu, Nong'an was the most important city in the northeast region of the Liao empire, (see Map 2). It was, and is, located next to the Yitong River which joins with the Songhua River 松花江 about 40 km to the north. Nong'an lies in the middle of the sedimentary basin, the Northeast China Plain, which has been a feature of the landscape for at least the last 6,000 years.⁵⁹ Nearby, about 30km downstream on the Yitong River, lies Wanjintaxiang, known as Xiangzhou 祥州 during the Liao dynasty.⁶⁰ The surrounding countryside is flat and the rivers, including the Yitong, flow slowly around switchback meanders as they have done for thousands of years.⁶¹ During the Liao dynasty, to the east and north lay the territories controlled by the Jurchen 女真 tribes, (see Map 2). The Jurchens, although vassals of the Liao rulers, were still a threat and there were periodic instances of Jurchen looting raids penetrating into Liao areas.⁶² The 5000 soldiers based at Huanglong fu, close to the Jurchen territories, were not there just as a show of strength, but to be close enough to be able to respond rapidly. The *Liao shi* records that the Huanglong fu soldiers were sent to ward off one such Jurchen incursion in 1040 A.D.⁶³

The population of Huanglong fu, as described above, would have been a cross-section of all the groups that made up the Liao population. Many Han and Bohai may have been deported to Huanglong fu to work for the garrison there. Artisans would have been needed to make and maintain the military equipment. Although the daily winter temperatures do not rise above -20°C, the summers are hot

and coincide with most of the region's rainfall thus providing a short but reliable growing season for crops, so farmers too would have been needed to help on the land.⁶⁴

Conscription of men for military service was imposed on all of the communities. Many Han and Bohai men became infantry soldiers and Han men were also conscripted as horsemen for the ordo guard.⁶⁵ The Huanglong fu garrison is likely to have consisted of soldiers from the Han and Bohai populations as well as from the Khitans, Xi and other tribal populations. By the late 1030s, excessive military conscription demands, especially for service at the frontiers, led to Xiao Hanjianu 萧韩家奴, one of the Liao court's Confucian scholars, drawing attention to the acute problems that the demands were causing.⁶⁶ In particular, he highlighted the suffering of families with no male member of the family fit for military service, who had to borrow money to hire a replacement to fill the required position but the loan involved such high rates of interest that families were being forced to sell their fields and even their children.⁶⁷ Wealthier families suffered too as they were chosen not only to provide a man for military service but it would specifically be for service at the frontier and the family would also have to provide the man's supply of grain.⁶⁸

The Khitan traditional, seasonal, nomadic life continued to be practised by the Khitan royal court.⁶⁹ For the period of late winter and early spring the emperor and his court relocated to the northeast, erecting their yurts by the side of the river lakes near Huanglong fu. Whilst the lakes were still frozen, holes were drilled through the ice for fishing and then, as the ice melted and the waterfowl returned, the sport of hunting wild geese with eagles took over.⁷⁰ This annual visit by the emperor to the Huanglong fu area was also the regular occasion on which the Jurchen tribal leaders paid homage to the Liao ruler. In 1112 A.D., it was here, near Huanglong fu, following feasting and drinking that the Jurchen tribal leader Aguda refused to dance for the Liao emperor.⁷¹ It was a symbolic event that preceded the military successes of the Jurchens and the establishment of the Jin 金 dynasty with Aguda its first emperor, whilst defeats and disintegration followed for the Liao empire.⁷² The early Liao rulers' suspicions about the Jurchens that had led to the Liao soldiers being stationed at Huanglong fu appeared to have been fully justified.

Chapter 3: Liao Society: Two Cultures, Two Administrations

3.1 Cultural differences and instability

When cultural diversity in China is considered, then the Tang dynasty is almost always mentioned. “Cosmopolitan” is an adjective that often accompanies descriptions of the Tang dynasty.⁷³ During the Tang dynasty, China was at the centre of international trade and communities of foreign merchants and businessman developed and grew, especially in cities such as Chang’an 长安 and in southern coastal cities located at the ends of the overland and maritime silk routes. Frequent, successful working relations between the foreign traders and Han businessmen and traders helped build awareness, familiarity and acceptance of the mutually different cultures. Other Han people were not involved in such close contact and although the number of foreigners in China was negligible in comparison with the total Han population, cultural perceptions about the threat of the foreigners were not dependent on mathematical numbers alone: simply that they were “different” was a very powerful factor. The cosmopolitanism of Tang dynasty China did not prevent the massacre of foreigners in Yangzhou in 760 A.D. and in Guangzhou in 879 A.D.⁷⁴

During the two centuries before the foundation of the Liao empire, many Khitan representatives had travelled to Chang’an as ambassadors to pay homage to the Tang rulers. Whilst there, the Khitan representatives were themselves part of Chang’an’s foreign component of life. Through these visits the Khitans were aware that the possibility of different cultures all working together was both feasible and it could be successful.⁷⁵ However, in the Liao empire, out of a maximum population of the order of 4 million, less than 1 million were Khitans.⁷⁶ In addition to this numerical imbalance, there was also a geographical one. Although the Khitans had deported masses of Han and Bohai people to different parts of the empire, the majority of the Han and Bohai still lived in the southern parts and were still engaged in farming the land there. With the foundation of the Liao empire, the Khitans, the minority rulers, had the immediate challenge of attempting to control and govern two distinct populations, without mutual perceptions of “different” growing into a fear that the “others” posed an immediate “threat”.

3.2 Two Cultures, Two Administrations: Liao Society

Twentieth century decisions concerning policies towards people with different cultures living in the same country usually occur in the context of immigration or in situations where the different populations have lived in the same country for many generations. The foundation of the Liao empire involved very different circumstances: the minority, the Khitans, had invaded or had been ceded the lands of the majority; the majority, the Han and the Bohai, were dominated and controlled by the Khitans; the Han and Bohai who had "migrated" to new areas were, in fact, transported prisoners. "Segregation, integration, assimilation" lists a continuum of approaches for governing two or more different cultures. The Khitans imposed policies lying at the segregation end of this spectrum. In 921 A.D., an imperial edict ordered that the Han and the Bohai should be judged by their laws and different laws would be used for the Khitans and the other nomadic tribes.⁷⁷ The Han and the Bohai were subject to a legal and administrative system, the Southern Region jurisdiction that was modelled on what they had been used to. The Khitans and other nomadic tribes living in the Liao territories were subject to a separate and different system, the Northern Region jurisdiction, reflecting the laws and customs with which they were familiar.

The Khitans divided their empire into four regional administrative networks: in the north, the Supreme Capital Circuit; in the south, the Western Capital Circuit, the Central Capital Circuit and the Eastern Capital Circuit, (see Map 1).⁷⁸ Each circuit was subdivided into administrations, *fu* 府: Huanglong *fu* was one of the Eastern Capital Circuit administrations.⁷⁹ An administrative centre, a capital city, was built in each of the circuits.⁸⁰ The Supreme Capital, Shangqing 上京, was built by forced labour in 918 A.D in the design of a typical Han city. The imperial palace in the north of the city was where the yurts of the royal court were erected during the emperor's visits there. The southern part of the city had permanent dwellings for the Han households that had been transported there.⁸¹

Mote, writing in 1999, commented that the Liao dual administration may have been the first but it was certainly not the most recent adoption of a policy in China of "One country, two systems" 一国两制.⁸² In fact, the Liao dual administration was not as straightforward as two systems in two separate distinct parts of the land: it was two systems in practise throughout the land. Although

most of the sedentary population remained in the south and most of the nomadic population remained in the north, there had been significant forced relocation of Han and Bohai households to the north and some of the northern-based tribes had moved into the Eastern Capital Circuit. Consequently, the Khitans made all Han and Bohai, wherever they lived in the Liao empire, subject to the same Southern Region jurisdiction, and all the nomadic tribes, wherever they lived within the Liao territories, subject to the same Northern Region jurisdiction.⁸³ People from the Han and Bohai populations who had worked in local government before the Khitans took control of their regions were employed to operate the Southern Region jurisdiction.⁸⁴

The Liao rule was characterised as “creative misunderstanding” by Wittfogel and Feng.⁸⁵ I think this label may suggest an element of underestimation of the Liao rulers. The cultural challenge facing the Liao rulers was immense. The dual administration system was scrutinised and periodically arguments were made to merge the two jurisdictions, such as in 1043 A.D., but further analysis always led to proposals for change being rejected.⁸⁶

Chapter 4: The Nong'an Pagoda: Buddhism and the Liao Empire

4.1 Buddhism behind the Imperial Throne

Buddhism reached China along the northern overland trade routes during the first century A.D.⁸⁷ Earlier in the Han dynasty, Confucianism had become established as the official ideology. Confucian teachings such as filial piety and worship of one's ancestors that underlay the succession rights to the Imperial throne were accepted by ordinary people but many facets of Confucianism remained the preserve of scholars.⁸⁸ For ordinary people, mystical and Daoist traditions and beliefs remained strong. Involvement in those beliefs and practices did not preclude involvement in other ideologies and aspects of Buddhism registered strongly with increasing numbers of ordinary people in China in the centuries that followed its arrival. The idea that life involves suffering but that eventual escape is possible and that "good" deeds towards others will facilitate that eventual escape, would have appealed to many in China and, in the tenth century A.D., would do so again to many Khitans.

Buddhism was also a potential source of support and validation for someone who attained the imperial throne by unconventional means, by un-Confucian means. Yang Jian 楊堅, Emperor Wen of Sui 隋文帝, after seizing power in 581 A.D. when he was regent for the Northern Zhou child emperor, actively promoted Buddhism, ordering the building of many new Buddhist temples and stupas.⁸⁹ His championing of the nationally popular Buddhist faith also lent legitimacy to his reign after the manner in which he had gained the throne went against traditional Confucian values.⁹⁰ Over a hundred years later in 690 A.D., Wu Zetian 武則天 became Empress Regnant as the first ruler of the Zhou Dynasty 周代. This was clearly at odds with Confucian norms that placed women in subsidiary roles to men. She too promoted Buddhism, as a way of legitimising her reign, including ordering the distribution throughout China of a *Great Cloud Sutra* commentary foretelling the reincarnation of the Buddha Maitreya as a woman.⁹¹

Biran suggests that the Liao rulers engaged in "patronage of Buddhist institutions, for the purpose of enhancing the Khitans' own legitimacy."⁹²

Buddhism was promoted by the Liao rulers and became increasingly popular but this seems to have reflected a genuine involvement in Buddhism rather than, as suggested by Biran, an imperial legitimacy issue. In particular, Abaoji's adoption of the principle of primogeniture suggests that promotion of Confucianism rather than Buddhism was important to legitimise the family's reign, and the Liao rulers did promote Confucianism as well as Buddhism. Abaoji, after naming his eldest son as his heir in 916 A.D., founded a Temple of Confucius. When his officials told him he should worship Buddha, Abaoji replied "Buddhism is not a Chinese religion" 佛非中国教.⁹³

4.2 Buddhism and the Liao Empire.

In 902 A.D., before Abaoji was elected as their leader, the *Liao shi* reports the building of what may have been the Khitans first Buddhist temple.⁹⁴ It seems that many Khitans, especially the Liao rulers, found Buddhism an attractive and fulfilling religion. The contact and interaction with the Han that the Khitans had been involved in for centuries meant that they were already familiar with Buddhism.⁹⁵ The contact had been sufficiently close that the Khitans had even risen up against mistreatment by the Han during the Zhou dynasty, during Wu Zetian's reign mentioned above.⁹⁶ Many of the Han and Bohai living in the Liao territory were already followers of Buddhism and they were joined in this commitment by many Khitans. Reports in the *Liao shi* reveal the growth in numbers of Buddhist devotees living in the monasteries during the Liao dynasty: when the Empress was unwell in 942 A.D., Emperor Taizong organised rice to be distributed to fifty thousand Buddhist monks;⁹⁷ in 1078 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Daozong 道宗, food was donated to three hundred and sixty thousand Buddhist monks and nuns.⁹⁸ Mote observes: "Throughout the Liao dynasty we can speak of an unending Khitan fascination with Buddhism" but adds that the Khitans' commitment to Buddhism did not mean that their dedication to and involvement in animistic traditions disappeared.⁹⁹

Before establishing the Liao empire, the Khitan funerary traditions, over many centuries, had involved sky burials, leaving corpses in trees on mountains for several years, before the remaining bones were collected, burned and buried.^{100,101} During the Tang dynasty, Han corpses or, with the increasing practise of Buddhism,

their cremated remains were buried.¹⁰² For Tang emperors and relatives, their burial tombs typically consisted of rectangular chambers with domed roofs.¹⁰³ During the Liao dynasty, burial in tombs also became the funerary practice for important Khitans. The initial design of the tomb chamber changed first from rectangular to circular, sometimes with ceiling features such as a central mirror inside a painted eight-petal lotus flower, and then, by the middle of the eleventh century, to hexagonal or, more frequently, octagonal designs.¹⁰⁴ Steinhardt has suggested that these changes may have resulted from an increasing Buddhist influence: the designs involving eight-fold symmetry reflecting the symmetry of Buddhist mandalas; features such as a mirror within a lotus symbolising rebirth in a Buddhist paradise.¹⁰⁵ The occurrence of the changes towards the middle of the eleventh century may have been significant because for Tantric Buddhists, such as the Khitans, 1052 A.D. was the start of the Third Age of Buddhism, the *mofa* 末法.¹⁰⁶

4.3 Pagodas and Buddhism

Today, there are more than 25,000 Buddhist pagodas in China, a numerical reflection of Buddhism's long history in China and its extensive appeal.¹⁰⁷ Steinhardt suggests that the earliest freestanding Chinese pagoda dates from 523 A.D.¹⁰⁸ The Chinese *ta* 塔, pagoda, developed from the Indian Buddhist stupa, within which religious relics were stored and protected.¹⁰⁹ It may be that protective frameworks built around stupas and the designs associated with Chinese watchtowers led to the familiar appearance of the multi-storeyed pagoda.¹¹⁰ As with the Liao Buddhist tombs mentioned above, the geometrical design of a pagoda has special significance. Chinese pagodas have an even number of sides and an uneven number of floors. The even number of sides, a *yin* 阴 number, reflects an association with the earth: four sides for the cardinal directions, eight sides for both the cardinal and primary inter-cardinal directions. The odd number of floors, a *yang* 阳 number, is associated with the pagoda rising towards the sky, towards heaven and the sun.¹¹¹ These geometrical significances led Soper to describe pagodas as "elaborate cosmological symbols".¹¹² The majority of Liao pagodas, including the Nong'an pagoda, are octagonal, with thirteen storeys and made of brick.¹¹³ In many Chinese pagodas the Buddhist relics were contained within the pagodas themselves just as in India where the relics were inside the stupas; but some pagodas, perhaps

reflecting the Chinese practice of constructing tombs for imperial burials, had an underground chamber in which the relics were sealed.¹¹⁴

During the Liao dynasty, pagodas were usually closely linked to a Buddhist temple and monastery. Either the temple and pagoda were built at the same time or, especially if funds were limited, the temple was built first and the pagoda was built later.¹¹⁵ This is indicated by the saying: "A temple may not have a pagoda; a pagoda must have a temple". 有寺未必有塔，有塔一定有寺。¹¹⁶ Steinhardt appears to support this claim when writing in 2016:

In fact, every known pagoda in East Asia of the tenth–thirteenth centuries, of Liao or other patrons, was either the dominant structure in its monastery or one of a symmetrically positioned pair.¹¹⁷

Steinhardt may have overlooked the case of the Nong'an Pagoda for which, so far, no evidence of an associated monastery has been found. Whilst it seems unlikely that there was not an associated temple, at present, the belief that there was a temple rests on the assumption that the phrase "a pagoda must have a temple" is always true as the alternative is considered "unimaginable", 是难以想象的。¹¹⁸ Steinhardt does later concede:

One cannot yet prove that a towering pagoda was a standard feature in a Khitan walled town, nor that its presence indicated a nearby monastery of lower buildings or a smaller structure within view of its top story.¹¹⁹

The pagoda, stretching and pointing towards heaven whilst protecting precious relics, was an unmistakable symbol of and focus for Buddhism but occasionally the pagoda's exceptional height led to a different, additional significance. In the eleventh century the southern edge of Liao dynasty control ran close to the Song dynasty city of Dingzhou and became a source of military tension. A special pagoda was built in the grounds of the Kaiyuan Temple in Dingzhou. It was special because it was at 84m, the tallest brick pagoda in China.¹²⁰ Stelae discovered inside the pagoda indicate that the pagoda's exceptional height was not designed just to respect the value of the Buddhist scriptures to be stored inside but specifically for use in observing the Liao enemy troop movements.¹²¹ Perhaps to acknowledge the military wisdom of Sunzi 孙子, who advised simply to concentrate all available strength, keep a close watch on the enemy, and then obtain reinforcements 足以并力料敌取人而已, the pagoda was always known as the Liaodita 料敌塔.¹²²

4.4 Nong'an Pagoda: Religious and Military Significance

The Nong'an Pagoda, located near the centre of Nong'an at the junction of Baota jie 宝塔街 and Huanglong lu 黄龙路, was restored in 1983.¹²³ It is a 44m tall, octagonal, *miyan* 密檐 (dense eaves) style brick pagoda with 13 roof eaves,¹²⁴ as shown in the photograph on the front cover of this dissertation. Assessment of the pagoda's architectural features along with the analysis of the changing political situations and the variations in popularity of Buddhism in the region had strongly suggested the final decade of Emperor Shengzong's 圣宗 reign during the 1020s as a likely period for when the pagoda was built.¹²⁵ An example of the substantial support and promotion of Buddhism during Shengzong's reign is the rebuilding of the now World Heritage status timber frame pavilion at Dule Monastery.¹²⁶ Shengzong's personal name, Wenshunu 文殊奴, slave of bodhisattva Wenshu, may also be related to the positive encouragement that Buddhism received during his reign.¹²⁷

In 1953, during repair work on the Nong'an pagoda, Buddhist relics were discovered in a sealed chamber on the tenth floor. The finds included: boxes made of silver, porcelain and wood; small statues of Sakyamuni Buddha and Guanyin Bodhisattva, a porcelain incense burner; a cloth with bone ashes inside.¹²⁸ The designs of the discoveries were consistent with the suggested likely construction date for the pagoda in the 1020s.

In 1970, excavations 25 kilometres to the northeast of Nong'an at Wanjintaxiang led to the discovery of an underground chamber beneath a mound, known locally as Banjie ta 半截塔 that was the stunted remains of a pagoda.¹²⁹ The chamber walls were decorated with paintings and still inside were found everyday items such as tables and chairs, mirrors, coins, and, also, a small, carved, painted stone pagoda, a small iron pagoda, copper chopsticks, and cremated remains in a bronze box.¹³⁰ The coins were Northern Song coins from the Tianxi 天禧, 1017–1021 A.D. period and thus dated the sealing of that chamber as no earlier than 1017 A.D. whilst also suggesting that the 1020's date for the building of the Nong'an pagoda in what was then the neighbouring Huanglong fu was not unreasonable.¹³¹ In addition, the presence of a second important Buddhist building further reflects the importance of Buddhism in that region during the early part of the eleventh century.

The Treaty of Shanyuan 澶淵, agreed between the Song and Liao Empires in 1005 A.D., ended the repeated military conflicts along what became as a result of the treaty the Liao Empire's southern frontier.¹³² Although suspicions and tensions were not eliminated and led to the continued use of the Liaodi pagoda as an observation platform, the peace lasted for more than a hundred years. Following the Treaty of Shanyuan, dangers from further to the east became the priorities of the Liao military. The murder of the vassal Goryeo King Mokjong 穆宗 during a coup in 1009 A.D. led to a series of punitive, revenge attacks on Goryeo before peace was finally resumed in 1022 A.D.¹³³ However, by then the economy and life of the Bohai region of the Liao empire, present day Liaoning Province, had suffered as a result of the military campaign. When, in addition, in 1029 A.D., there was a threat to the Bohai region's autonomy concerning tax raising procedures, retained after the region had been conquered by the Khitans in the previous century, there was a rebellion that lasted a whole year.¹³⁴ In that same year, the Jurchens added to the unrest by delaying their tribute to the Liao.¹³⁵ It was the Jurchens that now posed the greatest threat to the Liao, and ultimately, at the start of the next century, it was the advance of the Jurchens through Huanglong fu, that led to the fall of the Liao empire.

The planning and building of the Nong'an pagoda in what was then Huanglong fu may not have been solely for Buddhist religious reasons: it may also have served a military purpose. Huanglong fu was the major garrison at the eastern edge of the Liao empire adjacent to the Jurchens' territories. That area, part of the Northeast China Plain, is flat. A pagoda within the garrison city would provide an important lookout observation platform. In a flat region, such as around Huanglong fu, a person on the ground would have a visibility horizon of about 5km and from the roof of a one storey building about 7km; but, from the top of a 44m pagoda the person would be able to see a horizon 24 km away.¹³⁶ Combining the vision ranges, a person standing on the ground in Xiangzhou, now known as Wanjiantaxiang, would have been able to see the top of the pagoda in Huanglong fu and signalling, perhaps with bonfires, across the 25km distance between would not have presented any difficulty. The Song were already planning to make use of the Liaodita in Dingzhou as a military observation platform so it would not be surprising if the Liao had planned similar use of the pagoda in Huanglong fu.

If the Nong'an pagoda is the exception and is "a pagoda without a temple" then it may be that the military imperative accounts for this anomaly. Perhaps those involved believed that seeking approval for and gaining the necessary funding to build a Buddhist pagoda was more likely to be successful than for a military tower. Resources were not unlimited for Huanglong fu: when Huanglong fu requested permission to build three fort barriers and ten bonfire beacon platforms in 1026 A.D., an imperial decree agreed to the request but stipulated that the building had to take place in the time between agricultural activities.¹³⁷

4.5 Legends of the Building of the Nong'an Pagoda

Different versions of a legend recounting the building of the Nong'an pagoda tell of an astronomical omen during the Liao dynasty, sometimes mentioning that it occurred during the reign of Emperor Shengzong, (see Appendices 2 and 3). The omen foretold of trouble with an earth dragon *tu long* 土龙 and indicated the necessity to build a pagoda to crush the dragon to eliminate the threat of danger. At first, the earth dragon's head is detected at Xiangzhou so a start is made on building the pagoda there, but when the earth dragon moves 25 km to Huanglong fu, the half built pagoda at Xiangzhou is deserted and a fresh start is made in Huanglong fu itself. When that pagoda is completed the dragon is killed and the empire is saved.

Many of the legend details are consistent with geographical aspects of the location of the two pagodas at Nong'an and Wanjintaxiang. For example, a journey downstream is described where along the river bank from Huanglong fu "ran a continuous, unbroken undulating ridge, just like a long dragon, snaking 30 odd kilometres to the north of Xiangzhou", (see Appendix 2). The recent aerial photograph below (Fig.1) shows a section of the River Yitong flowing from Nong'an towards Wanjintaxiang.¹³⁸ The river meanders confirm how flat the land is there and the profusion of ox-bow lakes and traces of past meanders in the variation of the ground and vegetation colours indicate that in that region the river has been meandering in a similar fashion for a very long time. It might be that to a city astrologer or a visiting monk, as in versions of the legend, the levees, built on the river banks in an attempt to prevent flooding and increasing in height at vulnerable points such as at the apices of meanders, might have appeared almost like the serpentine, undulations of a dragon's body.

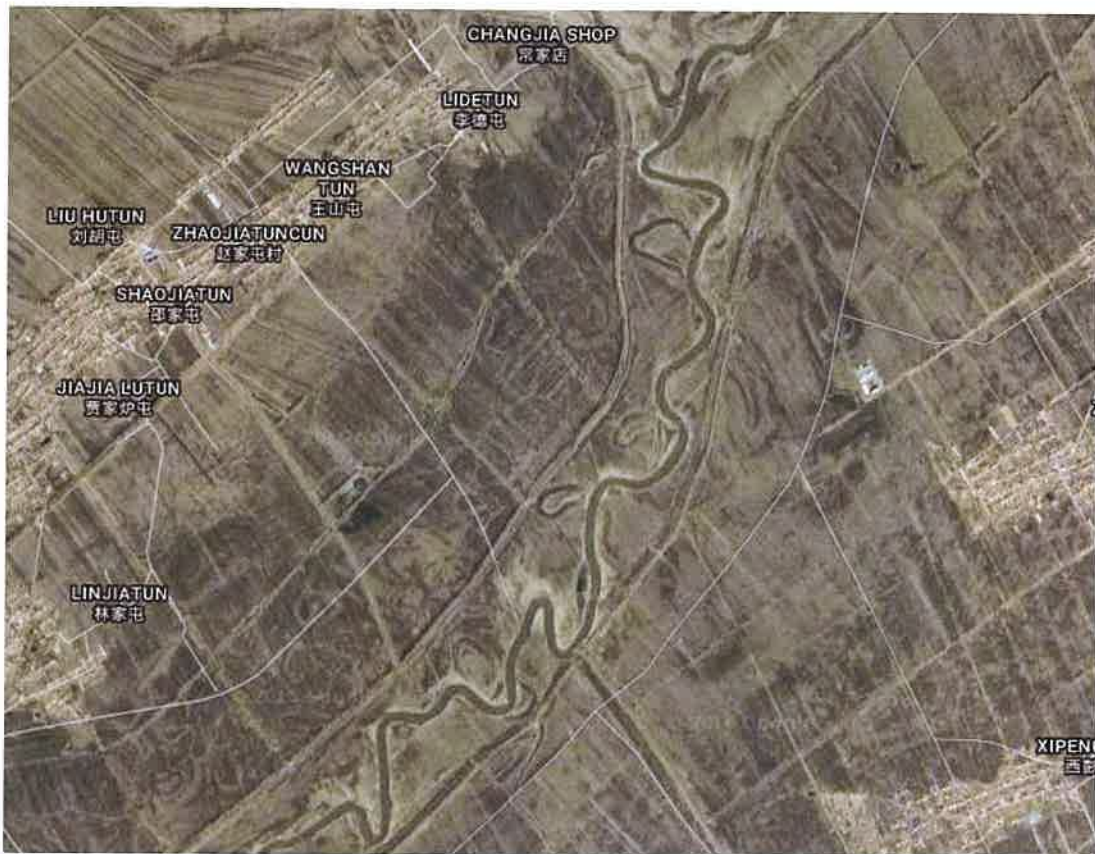


Fig. 1. Aerial photograph of the Yitong River between Nong'an to the southwest and Wanjintaxiang to the northeast. (North is towards the top of the photograph.)¹³⁸

The survival of the legend suggests that the Nong'an Pagoda continues to have a special significance amongst the local population. The legend involves mythical elements such as the earth dragon and, perhaps, the elimination of the threat of danger by the use of a pagoda has links to its use by Li Jing 李靖, the "Pagoda-Bearing Heavenly King".¹³⁹ The legend also makes reference to real places, a real emperor and real geography. It may be significant that the legend makes no mention of a temple or monastery at Huanglong fu. In the legend, the pagoda is built in Huanglong fu because of the threat of danger there, not because there was already a temple or monastery there. If the earth dragon symbolises a serious threat to Huanglong fu and the Liao empire during the late period of Emperor Shengzong's reign, then the threat from the Jurchens would be a strong contender for identification as the "earth dragon".

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Buddhism: a religion as a cause of stability

The causes of major conflicts between different groups of people are rarely simple but a religious element is often involved and that often involves different factions of the same religion. Buddhism flourished during the Liao dynasty and its multicultural following rather than fragmenting into conflicting factions became an important source of stability. The people living in the regions conquered by the Khitans had different traditions, different lifestyles and different languages. Many were transported to distant parts of the Liao empire, perhaps, to the eastern edge, to Huanglong fu. For many of these people, the teachings of Buddhism offered a shared source of solace. In Huanglong fu, the physical presence of the Buddhist pagoda was a visible, tangible reminder of personal hopes and beliefs for the inhabitants whatever first language they spoke: the pagoda was a shared source of spiritual reassurance and support.

5.2 Security as a source of stability

The Liao empire secured enduring peace with both the Song and Goryeo empires through the respective treaties agreed in 1005 A.D. and 1022 A.D. The Jurchens, the remaining major threat to the security of the Liao empire waited in the east. For the non-military residents of Huanglong fu, so close to the Jurchen territories, the large garrison of soldiers would have been a reassuring presence. For the soldiers themselves, accurate, up to date information about any Jurchen military activity would have been essential to ensure an appropriate state of readiness for action. It may have been that obtaining funding to build a Buddhist pagoda was likely to be more successful than for a permanent military observation tower, but once built, the pagoda could still fulfil the military needs as well. The building of the Huanglong fu pagoda, providing a permanent elevated lookout platform, would have meant that the soldiers had an extra important facility for gathering and signalling information over a much greater area around the city.

In the eleventh century, the costs of the materials and working time to build the pagoda in Huanglong fu would have been significant. Such a costly investment reflected a statement of intent, a statement of permanence, from those funding the construction. For the inhabitants of Huanglong fu, soldiers and civilians, whenever

they stepped outside and looked around, the presence and solidity of the pagoda pointing towards heaven was a reflection of that intent, that permanence, that stability.

Future developments, perhaps the unearthing of signs that there was a monastery with the pagoda at Huanglong fu, or, the discovery of new information about the development of the legend of the earth dragon and the building of the pagoda, may require the conclusions suggested here to be reconsidered, or, on the other hand, strengthen belief in them.

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Appendix 1

Elevation and the Associated Visible Horizon.

Diagram in Fig. 1 shows an observer at height h above the ground on a perfectly spherical Earth of radius R . The distance to the observer's visible horizon is d .

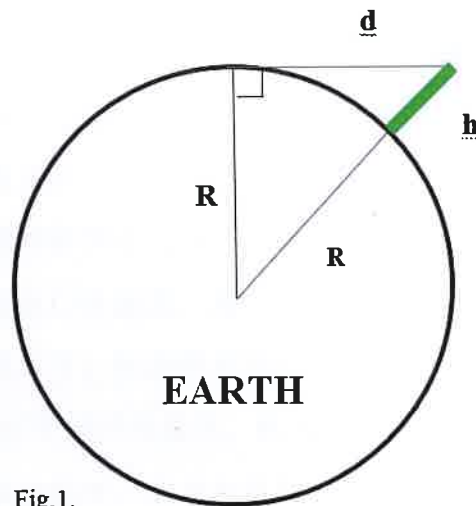


Fig.1.

By Pythagoras: $(R+h)^2 = R^2 + d^2$
 $R^2 + 2Rh + h^2 = R^2 + d^2$
 $d^2 = h(2R + h)$

Distance to observer's visible horizon, $d = \sqrt{h(2R + h)}$

Average radius of Earth, $R = 6371 \text{ km}$

For observer standing on ground, assume $h = 1.75 \text{ m}$

Then observer's visible horizon, $d = 4.72 \text{ km} \approx 5 \text{ km}$.

For observer standing on roof of one storey building, assume $h = 4 \text{ m}$

Then observer's visible horizon, $d = 7.13 \text{ km} \approx 7 \text{ km}$.

For observer standing at top of Nong'an pagoda, assume $h = 44 \text{ m}$

Then observer's visible horizon, $d = 23.68 \text{ km} \approx 24 \text{ km}$.

Appendix 2

Legend of the Origin of the Nong'an Pagoda: Version 1

One version of the legend concerning the origin of the Nong'an Pagoda ^a followed by my translation:

传说辽国钦天监夜观天象，见有流星自天而降，落在黄龙府地界。钦天监禀奏皇帝：有孽龙下世，将与大辽争夺天下，应立即修建宝塔镇压。皇帝便派钦天监率领官兵，从国都上京临潢府出发，晓行夜宿，经过茫茫大草原，整整走了七天七夜，来到黄龙府，宿在龙骧馆中。

是夜，钦天监见黄龙府城东门外，有紫气弥漫，直向东北。次日，钦天监官员命黄龙府尹陪同赴东门外察看。黄龙府城东门外是个大下坎，坎下有一条大河，便乘船向北顺流而下。河西岸是连绵不断的起伏冈陵，恰似一条长龙，蜿蜒 30 余公里，一直延伸到祥州城北。钦天监官员认定是一条土龙脉，有帝王气，龙头就在祥州城北门外。压龙先压头，便下令在祥州城北门外修建砖塔。

当塔修到七丈多高时，钦天监夜观天象，说土龙已掉转龙头跑到黄龙府去了，便立即停止修建祥州城的砖塔，率领官兵和民夫赶赴黄龙府，在黄龙府西门外，修了一座八角十三层的砖塔，上有铜顶，各层塔角悬挂铜钟、铁马。后来人们把这座塔叫龙湾塔，把祥州未修成的塔叫半截塔。因为土龙被镇压在塔下，作为真龙天子的皇帝便也心安了，所以黄龙府也有龙安府之称。

Translation

Legend [says that] one night in the Liao country, the Royal Astrologer saw a heavenly omen, a meteor fell from the sky and hit the ground on the edge of Huanglong fu. The Royal Astrologer reported to the Emperor that an evil dragon had fallen to the Earth and will fight with the great Liao to take control of the empire, so a pagoda should be built immediately to crush [the dragon]. The Emperor commanded the Royal Astrologer to lead the officers and soldiers, they set out for Huang[long] fu from the capital, through the vast grasslands, starting at dawn and

stopping to rest at night, a full seven days and nights away, and on arriving at Huanglong fu, stayed in the “Gallop Dragon Inn”.

At night, outside Huanglong fu’s east gate, the Royal Astrologer watched a purple, powerful essence diffusing straight towards the northeast. The next day the Royal Astrologer ordered the Commander of Huanglong fu to accompany him to inspect the area outside the east gate. Outside Huanglong fu’s east gate they came to a large ridge with a wide river on the other side from where they took a boat downstream towards the north. Along the river’s west bank ran a continuous, unbroken undulating ridge, just like a long dragon, snaking 30 odd kilometres to the north of Xiangzhou. The Royal Astronomer was convinced that this showed the presence of an earth dragon: there was the imperial essence and the head of the dragon was just to the north of Xiangzhou city. To kill the dragon, first you crush the head, so he ordered a brick pagoda to be built outside Xiangzhou city’s north gate.

When the tower reached about six feet in height, the Royal Astrologer, after interpreting the night sky’s heavenly signs, said the earth dragon had already turned around and the dragon’s head had run to Huanglong fu. They immediately stopped building the Xiangzhou pagoda, and the officers and men rushed to Huanglong fu to build, outside the west gate, an octagonal brick pagoda with thirteen floors, topped with a copper crown, and with copper bells and iron horses at the corners of every floor of the pagoda. Later people called this pagoda, “The Dragon Bay Pagoda”; Xiangzhou’s unfinished pagoda was called the “Half-finished Pagoda”. Because the earth dragon was crushed under the city’s pagoda, the real Dragon Emperor of China was able to relax again, and, consequently, Huanglong fu is also called Dragon Peace fu.

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Appendix 3

Legend of the Origin of the Nong'an Pagoda: Version 2

A second version of the legend concerning the origin of the Nong'an Pagodaⁱ followed by my translation:

在辽圣宗年间，一天，一个云游和尚来到了辽国，对辽主耶律隆绪说：“主上是真龙天子，德昭天下，但现在诸邦并起，不可不防。昨夜我观天象，辽国将有土龙出世，其位置在黄龙府东北处。”耶律隆绪一听，大惊失色，忙问：“仙长可有妙策？”和尚微微一笑，合掌道：“想避其灾难不难，可在那里修建一座塔，镇住龙脉，天下方能太平。”

于是辽主就下了圣旨，在和尚所指的黄龙府东北处修塔一座。可是修到一半时，和尚却又向辽主进言，称土龙已游移到黄龙府，镇龙脉之塔需建在黄龙府城内。为了维持自己的统治，并保住皇位，辽主对和尚所说深信不疑，遂下令废弃已经建了一半的塔，重新在黄龙府内修建另一座塔。即现在的农安辽塔。

Translation

One day, during the reign of the Liao Emperor Shengzong, a wandering Buddhist monk came to the Liao country, he said to the Lord Yelü Longxu (sinicised name of Emperor Shengzong): “My Lord is the real Dragon Emperor, everyone knows of your virtue but now many states unite [against you], [My Lord] cannot not take precautions. Last night I watched an astronomical event, [a sign that] an earth dragon will be born in the country of Liao, its location will be to the northeast of Huanglong fu. On hearing this, shocked and pale, [Lord] Yelü Longxu quickly asked: “Thoughtful Sir, can you suggest any positive steps to take?” The monk, smiling slightly with palms held together, said: “If you want to avoid this disaster it is not difficult, you can build a pagoda there to crush the dragon’s pulse [and then] the world will remain peaceful.”

So the Liao emperor then gave an imperial edict to the monk to build a tower to the northeast of the aforementioned Huanglong fu. However, after half the

building time, the monk spoke again to the Liao emperor, saying that the earth dragon had already drifted to Huanglong fu, [so now] the need was to build the pagoda inside the city of Huanglong fu itself to crush the dragon's pulse. Totally accepting all that the monk said and in order to keep himself in power and to remain on the emperor's throne, the Liao emperor then ordered the already half-built pagoda to be abandoned and a fresh start be made to build another tower that is now the Nong'an Liao Pagoda, inside the city of Huanglong fu.

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