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Eunuch Marriages and Adoptions: Evidence from the Tang

In Memory of John Kennedy Rideout (d. Hong Kong, 1950)

Abstract

Starting with Emperor Shun 順帝 (r. 125–144) of the Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220 AD) Dynasty, Chinese eunuchs married and were allowed to adopt sons as legal heirs.¹ Although this phenomenon has been noted in Chinese and Japanese scholarship and was discussed in Chinese historical writings, Western historians have largely ignored it, partly because the scarcity of sources did not allow for a systematic study of eunuch kinship networks. The excavation of thousands of so-called “entombed epitaphs” (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘) from the Tang 唐 (618–907) Dynasty near their former capitals of Chang’an 長安 and Luoyang 洛陽 in the 20th century allows scholars to study eunuch marriages and adoptions in-depth for the first time.

This article compares evidence for eunuch marriages and adoptions in transmitted and excavated texts, utilizing three kinds of biographical writings: entombed epitaphs, “spirit path stelae” (*shendaobei* 神道碑), and biographies from the two standard histories of the Tang, *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 and *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書. The focus is on three eminent examples: Gao Lishi 高力士 (684–762), who has a biography in both standard histories and whose inscriptions were partly transmitted in anthologies as well as excavated; Liu Honggui 劉弘{宏}規 (d. 827), who has an excavated epitaph and a spirit path stele, the

latter having been written and handed down in the collected works of Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850), an eminent political and literary figure of the 9th century; and Yang Zhilian 楊志廉 (d. 807), who has no biography in the standard histories, but whose epitaph as well as that of his wife have been unearthed, and among whose descendants were two of the most powerful eunuchs toward the end of the Tang. Comparing these three examples will help scholars to understand the late Tang eunuch institution and reveal some unexpected features, namely that some eunuchs claimed descend from the so-called eminent clans or aristocracy of Tang China.

Introduction

Marriage and adoption were regular features of the eunuch institution throughout the history of imperial China and not a special privilege only granted to individual eunuchs, even though some dynasties, such as the Song 宋 (960–1279) and Qing 清 (1644–1911), tried to prohibit or at least seriously curtail the practice.² Surprisingly, this phenomenon has been ignored by most Western scholars, whose perception of eunuchs – just as that of their East Asian colleagues – is often affected by a number of moralistic prejudices, most of which stretch back as far as to the Song, when Neo-Confucian historians contrived the narrative of eunuchs as a malicious group that hastened the decline of the Tang dynasty. This narrative, and the dearth of information on eunuchs in the works of those historians, who limit their account to the lives of a small number of individual cases that, according to the historian, had a detrimental influence on the politics of the dynasty, led to an image of Tang eunuchs that can be summarized in the following table:

View based on traditional sources	View based on epigraphic record
Most eunuchs suffered castration as a form of legal punishment or consequence of war and rebellion, thus separating them from their biological families, or were purchased as boys on “slave markets” in the South.	Families from the North, mostly from the capital region (Guanzhong 關中), provided the main supply with eunuchs by sending their sons to the palace, where often senior eunuchs adopted them.
Most eunuchs came from insignificant families without an office-holding tradition.	Some high-ranking eunuchs came from branches of the eminent clans, which had held lower to mid-level offices before.
Only individual eunuchs, who relied on the grace of an emperor, rose to power.	Eunuch clans secured their positions over generations via intermarriage and adoption with/from other eunuch families and elites.
The standard histories are our best and only source for studying eunuchs.	While historical works are biased against eunuchs, entombed epitaphs offer a more nuanced picture that can serve to balance the traditional account.
Non-eunuch officials invariably looked down on eunuchs as incomplete men.	The line between eunuch and non-eunuch officials was far more fluid under the Tang than later.

Apart from leading (or imitating) a normal family life and fulfilling the standard gender roles expected from men in traditional Chinese society – those of husbands and fathers,

some of them even following the Tang custom of joint burial (*hezang* 合葬) with their wives³ –, eunuchs used marriage and adoption to forge alliances among their own groups and with other elites. According to the epigraphic record and even the standard histories, the lives of eunuchs were not severed from their biological families once the palace doors closed behind them; quite the contrary, eunuchs continued to play an active role in maintaining or enhancing their families' status, either by supporting them directly from inside materially and politically or by entering kinship alliances with other eunuch clans or elite, often military, families.

One period in which the influence of eunuchs was particularly strong was the late Tang, from about the reign of Dezong 德宗 (779–805) until the year 903, when all but 30 eunuchs (of several thousands) in and outside of Chang'an were slaughtered at the behest of the Military Commissioner (*jiedushi* 節度使) Zhu Wen 朱溫 or Zhu Quanzhong 朱全忠 (852–912).⁴ In the 120 years between Dezong's reign and the massacre, eunuchs took control of the palace, the capital and provincial military, and certain branches of the civil government through so-called commissionerships (*shi* 使). Originally set up *ex officio* for very specific purposes, the commissionerships began to supplant the regular bureaucracy after the Rebellion of An Lushan (Chinese *An Shi zhi luan* 安史之亂, 755–63). Mainstay of eunuch control were the “four worthies among the mighty castrates” (*quanyan sigui* 權閹四貴), that is, the “Protectors-in-Chief of the Army of Divine Strategies” (*shencejun hujun zhongwei* 神策軍護軍中尉) for the left and right half of Chang'an, and the “Palaces Secretaries” or, more literally, “Commissioners for State Secrets” (*shumi shi* 樞密使). Since the reign of Xianzong 憲宗 (805–20), those four commissionerships were

almost constantly in the hands of eunuchs, sometimes transmitted from fathers to adopted sons. Another set of offices that gave eunuchs a foothold in the provinces of the empire – and a means to forge alliances with military families – was the large number of Military Surveillance Commissioners (*jianjun shi* 監軍使) that, in theory, served as the eyes and ears of the emperor in the circuits of military commissioners.

The Tang is the first dynasty for which we have ample of evidence for marriages and adoptions of eunuchs. While both practices are mentioned occasionally in the official or standard histories for the Tang and earlier dynasties (as will be discussed below), it is only through the excavated tomb epitaphs from the Tang that we begin to appreciate their prevalence, at least among an elite of eunuchs with high ranks and titles. According to Nicolas Tackett's database of epitaphs from the Tang and Five Dynasties (*Wudai* 五代, 907–960),⁵ the number of recorded epitaphs for eunuchs currently (as of 2016) amounts to 72, plus 21 for their spouses and daughters. More wives and adoptees are mentioned in the above number of epitaphs, amounting to over 250 members of eunuch families that are known. Most of those names do not appear in the traditional record, although they belonged to the uppermost elite of the empire. Epitaphs contain information on the family background, clan and marriage affiliation, career paths, and important events in the lives of tomb occupants that has otherwise disappeared from historical memory. They do not mention the castration. The tomb occupant's status as a eunuch is only deducible from his offices, which invariably contain the Palace Domestic Service (*neishisheng* 內侍省). A small number of eunuchs (15–20) has biographies in the standard histories of the Tang.⁶ Some of those have tomb epitaphs and spirit-road stelea, the latter erected outside of the tomb.⁷ The majority of eunuchs is only known through epigraphic sources.

The earliest epitaph for a eunuch wife dates to 802. Such a late date is noteworthy, given that eunuchs first rose to prominence during Xuanzong's 玄宗 reign (712–56). One of the earliest Tang epitaphs for a eunuch ever discovered, the one for Yang Sixu 楊思勗 (勗, d. 740), mentions a son, but no wife.⁸

The Origins of the Eunuch Institution

The origin of the institution of court or palace eunuchs in China is literally buried in the past: Based on paleographic and archaeological records, some scholars trace it back to the Shang 商 dynasty (16th century – ca. 1045 BC), and indeed, the character inventory of the Shang oracle bone script (*jiaguwen* 甲骨文), the earliest form of writing from China that survives, contains a character that denotes “castration.”⁹ However, on an analytical level, that evidence is rather tenuous, and one cannot urge for enough caution. Not all castrated males were eunuchs in the sense the term (or terms)¹⁰ were applied in imperial times, that is, to a certain type of emasculated functionaries holding certain offices within the palace walls. Most eunuchs throughout imperial times did not come to the palace as prisoners of war or convicted criminals, but were emasculated (i.e., had both their penis and testicles removed) as young boys. The sources usually do not inform us about the age at which the operation was performed, but refer to the boys generically as *yan'er* 閹兒 or, sometimes, *sibai* 私白 (“privately kept eunuchs”).¹¹

是時，諸道歲進閹兒，號「私白」，閩、嶺最多，後皆任事，當時謂閩為中官區藪。

During that time (the reign of Xuanzong 宣宗, 846–859), the regions presented emasculated boys as annual tribute, calling them “private and pure”. Those from Min (Fujian 福建) and Ling (Guangdong 廣東) were the most, they later would all be employed in the palace, so that at that time people called Min the “nursery for palace eunuchs.”¹²

Nevertheless, evidence for a southern slave trade that included emasculated boys sometimes mentioned by scholars is only circumstantial or anecdotal.¹³ Those eunuchs at least that were high enough in the hierarchy to merit a tomb epitaph came predominantly from the North.¹⁴ The largest number of eunuchs was probably sent to the palace by their birth families, in the hope that they would later support those families economically and politically after they had risen through the palace hierarchy. Castration as a punishment has never been the main source for palace eunuchs in China. The castrates of the Shang dynasty were most likely prisoners of war who suffered castration or emasculation as a form of punishment – whether they were employed as palace eunuchs is far from certain and may even be doubtful.

The earliest source that lends itself to a systematic study of Chinese court eunuchs dates to a much later age: the fifth century AD *History of the Later Han* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書). Its compiler, Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) initiates the tradition of including collective biographies of the eunuchs in the standard histories (*zhengshi* 正史).¹⁵ However, he also draws a connection between his account of the eunuchs of the Eastern Han Dynasty and

earlier periods, and speculates about the origin of the eunuch institution itself. In the introduction of his “Huanzhe liezhuan” 宦者列傳, Fan altogether mentions six eunuchs of pre-imperial times, the Spring-and-Autumn (*Chunqiu* 春秋) and Warring States (*Zhanguo* 戰國) periods (ca. 722–221 BC): Bo Diao 勃貂 of Jin 晉, Guan Su 管蘇 of Chu 楚, Jing Jian 景監 of Qin 秦, Mu Xian 繆賢 of Zhao 趙, Shu Diao 豎刁 of Qi 齊, and Yin Li 伊戾 of Song 宋.¹⁶ Of those six, Bo Diao – better known as Siren Pi 寺人披, *siren* being another term for eunuch – is mentioned several times in *Zuozhuan* 左傳 and *Guoyu* 國語 and thus by far the best known among them. He already features in military roles, predating the eunuch generals of the medieval period.¹⁷

Apart from the canonical justification Fan gives for the existence of eunuchs and which is discussed below, it is noteworthy that out of the six, he deems only the behavior of two as condemnable, and that of the other four as commendable.

然而後世因之，才任稍廣。其能者，則勃貂、管蘇有功於楚、晉，景監、繆賢著庸於秦、趙。及其敝也，則豎刁亂齊，伊戾禍宋。¹⁸

Now, of those who took up this occupation in later generations, their talents and duties were slightly more broadened: among the capable, there were Bo Diao and Guan Su, who proved their mettle towards Chu and Jin; Jing Jian and Mu Xian, who proved their use to Qin and Zhao. As for the ruinous ones, Shu Diao threw Qi into chaos and Yi Li wrought havoc in Song.

At the outset, Fan Ye deploys a whole array of “Confucian” or “*Ru*-ist” classics to assure his readers of the age and legitimacy of the eunuch institution, citing the *Canon of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經), the *Rituals of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), the “Monthly Ordinances” (“*Yueling*” 月令) chapter from the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), and the *Canon of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經). All the more surprising is his admission that he could only speculate as to why emasculated men are needed in the female quarters to begin with. Stepping away from the question of a canonical justification for the presence of eunuchs – we will return to it momentarily –, we find him offering a remarkable physiological and psychological hypothesis, namely that their physical impairment, which supposedly results in a lack of vital energy or *qi* 氣, renders eunuchs emotionally more benign and therefore better equipped to deal with palace women – a point maybe not lost on a society dominated by uncouth warriors and torn apart by warfare such as the Spring-and-Autumn and Warring States periods, and also Fan’s own time, the chaotic Southern and Northern Dynasties (*Nanbeichao* 南北朝, 386–589).

然宦人之在王朝者，其來舊矣。將以其體非全氣，情志專良，通關中人，易以役養乎？¹⁹

Now, as for the presence of eunuchs at the royal courts, its origin goes way back indeed. Is it possible that it is because of their bodies’ lack of complete *qi*, which renders their emotional disposition benign, makes them good at communicating with womenfolk, and easy to employ and rear?

The most likely cause for this ignorance is embedded in the classical quotations in the opening lines of the chapter just before. Canonical evidence for the existence of eunuchs is hard to come by, but Fan Ye is at dire straits to show that they must be an invention of the sages (*shengren* 聖人):

易曰：「天垂象，聖人則之。」宦者四星，在皇位之側，故周禮置官，亦備其數。閹者守中門之禁，寺人掌女宮之戒。又云「王之正內者五人」。月令：「仲冬，命閹尹審門閭，謹房室。」詩之小雅，亦有巷伯刺讒之篇。²⁰

The *Changes* say: “Heaven displays images, which the sages use as models.” Four eunuch stars are located next to the celestial position of emperor, thus the *Rituals of Zhou* installed this office, and also determined their number. (As) gatekeepers they ensure that the gates to the inner palace remain sealed, (as) *siren* they handle the prohibitions inside the palace of females. The *Rituals* also state: “The king’s regular inner servants are five in number.” The “Monthly Ordinances” dictate: “In midwinter, the overseer of eunuchs is ordered to inspect the palace gates and to be vigilant in regard to the bedchamber.” The “Small Elegies” of the *Odes* further contain the “Chief of Attendants”,²¹ which ridicules slanderers.

As none of these texts dates earlier than the first millennium BC, and some may not be older than the early imperial era, we are left with only one conclusion: we simply do not know when the institution of eunuchs arose in China. If we look for a religious or cosmological rationale for the existence of eunuchs in China, we are easily disappointed, because, contrary to the Christian Orient and South Asia,²² Chinese scholars were more

interested in the bureaucratic nature of the institution. Fan Ye also does not elaborate on his assertion, oft-repeated in later sources,²³ that the palace eunuchs mirror “four eunuch stars” (*huanzhe si xing* 宦者四星), which are located in close proximity to the celestial seat of the emperor (*huangwei* 皇位 or *dizuo* 帝坐/座).²⁴ The only slightly more elaborate description of those stars in historical sources appears, in equal wording, in *History of the Jin Dynasty* (*Jinshu* 晉書) and *History of the Sui Dynasty* (*Suishu* 隋書), both compiled under the early Tang in the seventh century.²⁵

The Beginning of Eunuch Marriages and Adoptions

Because any attempt to date the origin of the eunuch institution in China as such with any precision, I now turn to eunuch marriages, a peculiar feature of imperial China. Historical evidence for eunuch marriages is likewise scarce, and just as with the eunuch institution itself, we do not know when it first appeared. It may have been there from an early stage, for instance, if some eunuchs were married already at the time of castration,²⁶ but as a wide-spread phenomenon it is probably a later development. This we can infer from the critical tone in which it is first mentioned in historical sources. It most likely emerged in the late Warring States or early imperial period, when the rear palaces or “harems” of the feudal lords and later those of the Qin and Han emperors reached an unprecedented size. Starting from the reign of Emperor Wu 武帝 (141–87 BC), the number of women in the rear palace (*hougong* 後宮) became staggering. In the Han, eunuch also made their first appearance on the political stage under Emperor Wu and his second- and third-generation successors, Emperor Xuan 宣帝 (74–48 BC) and Emperor Yuan 元帝 (48–33 BC), in the

guise of the eunuchs Li Yannian 李延年, Shi Xian 石顯 and Hong Gong 弘恭. It is in this context that we read, in a remonstrance by Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 (ca. 107–47 BC):

「武帝游宴後庭，故用宦者，非古制也。宜罷中書宦官，應古不近刑人。」²⁷

Emperor Wu frequently held feasts in the rear court, which is why he relied on eunuchs, not because it conformed to the ancient statutes. His Majesty (Yuandi) should do away with the eunuch secretary (Shi Xian) and, in accordance with antiquity, not have intercourse with maimed men (eunuchs).

This, moreover, is one of the earliest instances in which the term *huanguan* 宦官 is used for eunuchs.²⁸ As is well known, most women in the rear court or palace did not serve the purpose of providing sexual pleasures for the emperor, and since eunuchs, apart from their own relatives, were the only men those women had social intercourse with, it seems likely that non-platonic relationships soon developed between some of them once the rear palace had reached a size (both in terms of women and eunuchs) that allowed for some anonymity. What might explain the sudden appearance of eunuch marriages slightly later, during the Eastern Han, is the rising impact of Confucian values during that time. Eastern Han society placed new emphasis on filial piety and other Confucian virtues (or at least their display), as is reflected in both the textual and funerary record. This may have given rise (and justification in the eyes of the state) the desire of eunuchs to conform to those Confucian values and have a family of their own. It also may have been a reflection of new inheritance practices: while small families remained the main economic unit during much of the Western Han, during the Eastern Han large estates and networks of lineages,

the sprouts of the great clans, became more common, and the edict by Emperor Shun (see next section) may just have been a concession in that direction. Of course, it is dangerous to argue from the silence of sources, but based on the above, it seems safe to assume that eunuch marriages did not rise much earlier than the late Western, Eastern Han dynasty.

Early evidence for eunuch marriages is less rare than may be expected, but almost always circumstantial. More often than to marriages, we find references to illicit sexual relations between eunuchs and palace women. The earliest explicit mentioning of eunuch marriages is again found in *Hou Hanshu*, in a memorial submitted by Liu Yu 劉瑜 in 168 AD, aimed against the extravagances in the imperial harem under Emperor Huan 桓帝 (r. 146–168).²⁹

The earliest mention of eunuch adoptions likewise dates to the Eastern Han era, at around 129 AD. In that year, Emperor Shun issued an edict that allowed eunuchs to adopt one son in order to hand down their wealth, estates, and noble titles.³⁰ But even after that, references to eunuch marriages remain rare in transmitted sources. Indeed, throughout the history of imperial China, eunuchs were famous – or notorious – for their family relations, and adopted sons and occasionally daughters (*yangzi* 養子, *jiazi* 假子, *yi'er* 義兒, or *yinü* 義女) are mentioned regularly.³¹ However, the two practices are never discussed at length before the Song,³² which could be an indication that they were widely accepted. They are mentioned in passing, for instance, when we learn that Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), famous general and (posthumously) Emperor Wu 武 of the Wei 魏 dynasty (220–265), was the grandson of a eunuch by adoption, since his father, Cao Song 曹嵩, had been adopted by the eunuch Cao Teng 曹騰.³³

Epigraphic Sources and the Pedigree of Eunuchs

The largest sample of sources offering information on the family status of eunuchs, their spouses, and children that could support any hypothesis on the practices of marriage and adoption are entombed epitaphs (*muzhiming*). Epitaphs have been unearthed in for almost every layer of the Tang elite, and also exist for eunuchs of later dynasties such as the Song and Ming 明 (1368–1644).³⁴ Based on, often very selective, samples, scholars have tried to discern patterns in the marital and adoptive choices eunuchs made. It is, however, the contention of this author that the number of epitaphs from the Tang currently at hand is yet too small, and the information therein too diversified, to draw any final conclusions about the social strata that entered into marriage or adoption – the latter being referred to by some scholars with the rather unlucky term “fictive father-son relationships” (*jiazi*)³⁵ – with eunuchs during medieval China.

Adoption does not necessarily presuppose the existence of marriages or vice versa, but the two are interlinked. Apart from the need to enjoy or, at least, imitate a family life, adoption serves the continuation of the lineage in cases where no biological heir is produced. Marriage, apart from companionship, serves the purpose of forging alliances between families, in order to secure or enhance the social status of the parties involved. In this context, daughters often play a key role. However, to simply assume that marriage and adoption serve the same purpose of forging alliances is overly simplistic. The *Tang Code* 唐律 forbade the adoption of sons who were not related on the paternal side (*yixing nan zhe* 異姓男者),³⁶ In 791, the emperor decreed that eunuchs could only adopt one son with the same family name (*tongxing* 同姓) who had not exceeded the age of nine.³⁷ Of

course, paper doesn't blush, and those regulations were regularly broken, but the concept of *yangzi* was probably much more fluid than hitherto assumed and may have allowed for a variety of meanings, from "adopting a legal heir" to "fosterage" and "patronage."

What becomes apparent when looking at the epigraphic record for eunuchs is that not a few of them claimed descent from one of the eminent clans (*haozu* 豪族, *daxing* 大姓, etc.) that constituted the office-holding elite of medieval China. Those claims can be gleaned from the presence of a so-called "choronym" (*junwang* 郡望) that is attached to the family name of an individual in an epitaph. Chinese scholars, even those who usually hold more balanced view on eunuchs such as Du Wenyu 杜文玉 – who wrote a series of insightful articles on "eunuch hereditary houses" (*huanguan shijia* 宦官世家) under the Tang – try to explain the existence of aristocratic eunuchs away. They argue that eunuchs who claimed descent from a great clan had either falsified their ancestry or were adopted by a non-eunuch member of one of the great clans. There are, however, several problems with this argument, not least that it is completely based on the silence of sources. On the contrary, both the content as well as our knowledge about the creation of epitaphs suggest that such claims were true. First of all, while many epitaphs were written on commission by less well-known literati of the Tang, who may have aimed at a premium for falsifying their clients' ancestry, others were authored by high-profile aristocrats. In this respect, Li Deyu's spirit path stele for Liu Honggui discussed below is a telling example. Given the pride Li took in his descent from one the most illustrious clans of the Tang – the Zhaojun Lis 趙郡李³⁸ – and the fact that his wife held the same choronym as Honggui,³⁹ it seems unlikely that he falsified such a claim for Liu. Secondly, when we look at the epitaphs for some eunuch spouses, we discover that some of them came from eminent clans as well. It

seems plausible that an aristocratic family would only be willing to marry off one of their daughters to a eunuch if that eunuch was from an eminent family himself. Thirdly, given the scathing criticism of eunuchs in post-Tang historical writings, if eunuchs had indeed forged their ancestry, we would expect that some later authors had mentioned it. Finally, the inclusion of eminent clan members into the body of eunuchs was part of a conscious policy at the end of the eighth century. In the 780s, the court tried to increase the number of eunuchs from reputable (= official) families (*liang zhou ru shi* 良胄入侍),⁴⁰ probably in an attempt to counterbalance the influence of eunuchs that had increased ever since the reign of Xuanzong and the Rebellion of An Lushan.

In the remainder of this article, I take the lives of three high-profile eunuchs from the eighth and ninth centuries as examples and, based on their official biographies, tomb epitaphs, and spirit path stelae, reconstruct their family relations. The three eunuchs in question are: Gao Lishi, confidant of Emperor Xuanzong, who has a biography in both *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu*, and whose tomb epitaph and spirit path stele have been excavated;⁴¹ Liu Honggui, a eunuch general of Emperor Xianzong, who only appears once in the standard histories, has no official biography of his own, but a tomb epitaph that was excavated and a spirit path stele handed down in the anthology (*bieji* 別集) of Li Deyu; and, finally, Yang Zhilian. While Yang himself is less distinguished than the other two, the Yang eunuch clan features prominently in the standard histories, with two of its members having official biographies and at least three more that are known through their epitaphs. Furthermore, in the case of Yang Zhilian, we are also in the possession of his wife's epitaph.

Example 1: Gao Lishi

Gao Lishi is arguably the most prominent eunuch of the Tang dynasty. Not only does he feature in historical writings, he also mutated into a literary persona. The most famous episode about him is associated with Li Bai 李白, the greatest of all Chinese poets. Once when Li Bai appeared drunk at the court of Xuanzong, he humiliated Gao by making him pull off the dirty boots from his feet.⁴² Li Deyu, one of the most mindful observers of the important role eunuchs played at the late Tang courts, immortalized Gao as an intimate witness of events during the Kaiyuan and Tianbao periods of Xuanzong in his *Jottings of Tales heard from the Lius* (*Ci Liu shi jiuwen* 次劉氏舊聞).⁴³

Gao Lishi's life is also one of the best documented of all Tang eunuchs. This is partly due to historical accident. According to Du Wenyu, Gao's spirit path stele broken in half early on;⁴⁴ the text of the upper part was recorded in Wang Chang's 王昶 (1725–1806) *Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編, but the physical remains were only discovered near the Tailing 泰陵 Mausoleum of Emperor Xuanzong in Shaanxi 陝西 Province in the 20th century. The upper part was unearthed by workers of the Pucheng County Cultural Center 浦城縣文化館 in 1963, the lower part in a production team stable (*shengchan dui siyang shi* 生產隊飼養室) in 1971. In 1992, archaeologists discovered Lishi's tomb near Shanxi Village 山西村 in Baonan District 保南鄉, Pucheng. His tomb epitaph was only found in 1999. According to the excavation report, his is the only satellite tomb of Tailing.⁴⁵ Gao further has biographies in both *Jiu* and *Xin Tangshu*.⁴⁶

Gao has often been taken as the typical example of a Tang eunuch, particularly concerning his descent and origin. So far, historians have not appreciated the full extent of the exceptionality of this case – in particular with regard to his place of birth, but also the conditions under which he became a eunuch.⁴⁷ Gao was born in Panzhou 潘州 in the deep South near modern Guangzhou 廣州, but his family originated from the North. His original surname was Feng 馮 and, according to all sources except *Jiu Tangshu*, which only states this surname,⁴⁸ one of his ancestors was Feng Ang 馮盎, a mid-level military officer from the North, who brought Lingnan 嶺南 under control for the Sui 隋 (581/89–618) and Tang courts.⁴⁹ Ang has a biography in both standard histories, and the one in *Jiu Tangshu* compares him favorably with the Qin general Zhao Tuo 趙佗, who established the Southern Yue 南越 kingdom in the waning years of the Qin.⁵⁰

Du Wenyu traces the ancestry of the Feng/Gao family tree back to officials under the Northern Yan 北燕 dynasty (407–436), as is indeed claimed by Gao Lishi's epitaph.⁵¹ Such attempts at reconstructing lines of office-holders that stretch back centuries should be treated with caution, though, partly because of the ubiquity of Chinese family names, partly because in the late Tang, almost every official claimed descent from some exalted ancestor, be it an emperor or an official of a previous dynasty. That is not to say that they necessarily forged their ancestry, to the contrary, families and the state probably strongly believed in the credibility of such claims, and many clans may have kept detailed records of their family trees and even of the whereabouts of their branch lineages throughout the chaotic centuries between the Han and Tang. However, the remnants of these records are fragmentary at best today, and Du throws together sources of varying provenance and

reliability (eighth century epitaphs and *Xin Tangshu* alongside historical works that were written or rewritten in the early Tang such as *Weishu* 魏書, *Jinshu*, etc.),⁵² to reconstruct a family tree that reflects contemporary ambition as much as historical accuracy.

Usually, the credibility of a claim to ancestry diminishes the further distant the alleged ancestors are in time, for instance, when an epitaph asserts that a family tree can be traced back to the Han dynasty, the feudal lords of the early Zhou, or even beyond, which in any case would be difficult to prove or refute. The question is whether the converse is true: if a text gives the exact names of the immediate ancestors – father, grandfather, and great-grandfather –, can we take such statements at face value or can we discard them because of our preconceptions about the nature of Tang elite society? Or would it be premature if not outright presumptuous, in absence of contrary evidence, to refute such a claim on the mere ground that we doubt a great clan would have one of its offspring castrated? What is more, if we doubt the veracity of ancestral claims made in the epitaphs for eunuchs, why should we believe such claims in the case of anyone else? Thus, assessing the credibility of ancestral claims made in epitaphs has to take into account several factors, of which the temporal distance from the presumed ancestor(s) is only one – albeit an important one. In addition, the internal coherence of the epitaph text as well as contextual knowledge about the tomb occupant, his family relations, and the relation to the author of the epitaph need to be addressed.

The tomb epitaph and spirit path stele for Gao, whose original name was Feng Yuanyi 馮元一, are typical, however, in another way, in that epitaphs for eunuchs usually mention the fact and (though somewhat briefly and inconsistently)⁵³ circumstances of the adoption and subsequent name-bestowal – if those two events occurred. Eunuchs often

assumed the surname of a patron in the palace, who was a eunuch himself. Gao's epitaph and stele both claim that Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 690–705) bestowed the surname Gao on him,⁵⁴ while only *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu* assert that he was adopted (*yang*, more a sort of fosterage or patronage), by Gao Yanfu 高延福, one of the eunuchs of Gaozong 高宗 (649–684) and Empress Wu.⁵⁵ Only the epitaph, not the stele, which would have been displayed above ground close to Xuanzong's Tailing mausoleum, mentions Gao Yanfu. Of further interest is some information on southern administrative practices given in the epitaph: Feng Ang had split the eighteen prefectures under his command into three and installed his sons as administrators, who then passed on the offices to their sons – a fact that probably led to the downfall of the Feng clan in Guangzhou. Lishi's biological father was one Feng Junheng 馮君衡.⁵⁶

According to the two inscriptions and the official biographies, Lishi's biological mother was a great-granddaughter of Duke Meng of Su 宿國猛公, that is, the Sui general Mai Tiezhang 麥鐵杖 (d. 612).⁵⁷ Lishi had lost sight of her since early childhood, but the Military Commissioner of Lingnan (*Lingnan jiedushi* 嶺南節度使) found her in Panzhou (Longzhou 瀧州 according to *Xin Tangshu*) and sent her to Chang'an. Lishi treated both her and the wife of his late adoptive father, Gao Yanfu, with equal filial devotion. Lishi's wife, Lady Lü 呂氏, was the daughter of a commoner (*nanzi* 男子) from Hebei 河北, Lü Xuanwu 呂玄晤, who served as a clerk in the capital administration (*li jingshi* 吏京師). After the marriage, Lishi secured his father-in-law the posts as vice minister (*shaoqing* 少卿) and prefect (*cishi* 刺史).⁵⁸ Lady Lü and Gao Lishi had several sons, two of which are mentioned in both inscriptions:⁵⁹ one, Chengyue 承悅, is designated as “nephew” (*youzi*

猶子 – though it may also mean “like a son”), the other, Chengxin 承信, is referred to as “adoptee” (*yangzi*). The epitaphs of at least two further descendants of Lishi, one having been a eunuch, the other a non-eunuch military officer, are known.⁶⁰ In 1954, the epitaph of Lishi’s second-eldest brother, Gao Yuangui 高元珪, who is otherwise unknown from transmitted historical sources, was excavated near Xi’an 西安.⁶¹ Like most epitaphs, so does Yuangui’s not mention siblings of the deceased, only Zhang Yue’s stele inscription and epitaph for Feng Junheng confirm that Yuangui was Lishi’s brother.⁶² It is interesting to note that Zhang uses the birth names of both Yuangui and the eldest brother, Yuanjin 元璡, while he calls the youngest, Yuanyi, who probably commissioned the inscriptions, only by his adoptive name, Lishi.

Example 2: Liu Honggui (775–826)

In 827, Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850), who later became one of the most powerful ministers of the ninth century, but at that time served his first term as a governor in the Southeast, composed a spirit path stele for the recently deceased eunuch general, Protector-in-Chief of the Left Army of Divine Strategies (*zuo shence jun hujun zhongwei* 左神策軍護軍中尉) and Commissioner for Cultivating Merit of the Left Half of Chang’an (*zuojie gongde shi* 左街功德使), Liu Honggui.⁶³ Among other things, Li praises Liu’s military exploits, which had saved the dynasty more than once. Liu is only mentioned once in the standard histories.⁶⁴ Liu’s ancestors had held mid-level military posts for generations.⁶⁵ His tomb inscription was written by the otherwise unknown Wang Shu 王琚.⁶⁶ The epitaph claims

that Liu belonged to the Pengcheng Liu 彭城劉 clan, according to Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 one of “the top sixteen office-holding clans” of Tang China.⁶⁷

As mentioned above, historian Du Wenyu and others doubt the veracity of that claim, because, in their view, no office-holding clan would have been willing to send its sons to the palace as eunuchs. That may have been true most of the time, but here, textual and contextual evidence weigh heavily in favor of the truth of that claim: First, as we saw above in the case of Gao Lishi, in cases of adoption, inscriptions tend to mention the natal surname of the adoptee and of the adopter, as well as the circumstances of the adoption. Liu’s spirit road epitaph and tomb inscription list his ancestors, beginning with his great-grandfather Su 愬 or En 恩, without as much as a hint at another surname, indicating that Liu was indeed his surname. Secondly, Liu’s ancestors were all minor military officers, and it was just in the 780s, when he entered the palace, that the court tried to increase the number of eunuchs from reputable (= official) families (*liang zhou ru shi*).⁶⁸ Thirdly, Li Deyu, the author of the spirit path stele, descended from one of the seven “marriage-ban clans,”⁶⁹ and his name even became a byword for class or clan consciousness in later ages. It seems unlikely that Li would have faked someone else’s ancestry – unless he urgently needed a favor, for which there is no indication. Furthermore, Li Deyu’s wife was also a Pengcheng Liu.⁷⁰ It is true that Li uses the choronym “Pengcheng” in an indirect manner and only twice in the text, in the noble title given to Honggui, “Fief-opening Viscount of Pengcheng County” (*Pengcheng xian kaiguo zi* 彭城縣開國子), and in that of his eldest son, Xingli 行立, “Fief-opening Earl of Pengcheng Prefecture” (*Pengcheng jun kaiguo bo* 彭城郡開國伯), who was later promoted to “Fief-opening Duke of Pengcheng County”

(*Pengcheng xian kaiguo gong* 彭城縣開國公).⁷¹ When Li describes Liu's ancestry at the outset of the epitaph, he uses language that is quite vague:

派流甚遠，珪組相承，炳焯周邦，光揚史牒。⁷²

The branches (of his clan) spread eminently far, handing down noble ranks to one another, setting the whole empire ablaze, and being famously praised in the historical records.

One possible explanation for this is that Li wanted to hide the fact that the eunuch Liu Honggui was from an eminent clan. Another curious issue is that of Liu's given name, Honggui 弘規 (the *Quan Tangwen* version of the stele reads 宏規). Both the epitaph and stele state it was identical with his courtesy name and bestowed (*ci* 賜) on him during the reign of Xianzong. No other name is given in either of the texts, which means that, if we agree with Du Wenyu that the claim to Pengcheng Liu ancestry is a fake, then are we not only left ignorant with regard to Honggui's original family name, but also to his personal name. In addition, the verb *ci* is used in other inscriptions and in sources in general for the bestowal of personal names, but is much more common for the bestowal of surnames (*cixing* 賜姓), particularly with regard to eunuchs who take on the family name of their palace patrons or adoptive fathers. Rather than assuming that the two authors in question falsified Liu Honggui's ancestry, it seems more likely that he came from an impoverished sub-branch of the Pengcheng Lius, and that by the late eighth century (the epitaph states Honggui was admitted into office [*yingxuan* 應選] at the age of 15 – i.e., 16 by Western

reckoning – in ca. 791) sending a boy to the palace as a eunuch was the only way of re-enhancing their social status.

The next person of interest is Liu's wife, whose name is given as *Miguo furen Li shi* 密國夫人李氏 in the epitaph and as *Longxi Li shi* 隴西李氏. The first title shows that she was given a title of her own when Liu was still alive; the second one may or may not indicate that she was a relative of the imperial clan, who also held the choronym Longxi. Both Longxi and Pengcheng were clan choronyms that appear regularly in the epigraphic record of eunuchs and their spouses (another one is Taiyuan Wang 太原王).

So far, the *muzhiming* of two grandsons of Liu, Liu Zunli 遵禮 and Liu Zhongli 中禮, have been excavated. Both were eunuchs and claimed to be Pengcheng Liu.⁷³ Zunli was most certainly adopted, but the claim to Pengcheng ancestry may still be true as he could have been an agnatic cousin or nephew.⁷⁴ Furthermore, his epitaph was written by Liu Zhan 劉瞻, a Grand Councilor of Emperor Yizong 懿宗 (859–73) and a Pengcheng Liu himself.⁷⁵ Again, do we consider it possible that members of the great clans, in this case even of the same one, were willing to support false claims of ancestry?⁷⁶

Example 3: The Hongnong Yangs

One of the most eminent eunuch clans of the ninth century descended from Yang Zhilian, who died in 807.⁷⁷ He seems to have been an adopted, his father being the Eunuch Palace Attendant (*neichangshi* 內常侍) Yang Yanzuo 楊延祚, but there is no hint at a change of surname. Instead, Zhilian was enfeoffed as “Fief-opening Baron of Hongnong County” (*Hongnong xian kaiguo nan* 弘農縣開國男) in 788, just as his wife, Lady Liu, who was a

Pengcheng Liu, was posthumously bestowed the title “Lady of Lu” (*Luguo furen* 魯國夫人). This could indicate that Zhilian, even though he was adopted, was, in fact, an agnatic relative of Yanzuo and indeed a Hongnong Yang – another most prominent choronym; or that the enfeoffments of the late Tang involved some of the older choronyms, which were then used like the old choronyms in epitaphs of later generations. Currently, epitaphs of two other eunuchs and one woman are known who claim to descend from Yang Zhilian and the Hongnong Yang clan.⁷⁸ The woman, Yang Ting 楊珽, whose courtesy name was Qionghua 瓊華, was a granddaughter of Yang Yanzuo and married another Pengcheng Liu, but it remains unclear whether her husband was a eunuch. According to her epitaph, he was Protector-in-Chief of the Left Army of Divine Strategies and Commissioner for Cultivating Merit of the Left Half of Chang’an, two of the most exalted eunuch posts, but his title does not mention the Palace Domestic Service, usually the only clear indication that a person was a eunuch.⁷⁹ Only their son’s title contains the Palace Domestic Service.

Two great-grandsons of Zhilian, Yang Fugong 楊復恭 and Yang Fuguang 楊復光, have biographies in the two standard histories and became powerful toward the end of the Tang.⁸⁰ According to *Xin Tangshu*, Fugong and Fuguang were adopted, and it gives their birth names as Qiao 喬 (Fuguang) and Lin 林 (Fugong).⁸¹ Fugong’s *Jiu Tangshu* biography states that he became a eunuch at an early age “because of his father” (以父, 幼為宦者, 入內侍省),⁸² the one in *Xin Tangshu* boasts that he had 600 adopted sons, again, calling into question the concept of “adoption.”

Conclusion

In this paper, I introduced the tomb epitaphs (*muzhiming*) of several high-profile eunuchs from the late Tang. I showed that eunuch epitaphs do not give away the fact of castration, but they are identifiable by the mentioning of the Palace Domestic Service (*neishisheng*) in their titles.⁸³ Apart from that, eunuch epitaphs read like epitaphs of ordinary officials: they list ancestors, spouses, and descendants without distinguishing between adoptive and biological relatives. A feature not touched upon above is that epitaph authors are eager to emphasize the masculine qualities of their clients.⁸⁴

The lack of distinction between adoptive and biological families in the epitaphs is particularly problematic with regard to the choronyms, which identify some eunuchs and their spouses as members of the great clans of Tang China. While most Chinese scholars disregard such claims as forgery, I here have shown enough evidence to suggest that the answer to this question remains at least open. One is related to the matter of authorship: Alexei Ditter distinguishes between epitaphs written on commission and those written by family members.⁸⁵ With regard to clan identity, the social status of the author himself must be taken into account. Is it plausible that members of great clans consciously forged the great clan identity of a eunuch? While most epitaphs for eunuchs were authored by figures otherwise unknown, who may have forged such a claim for payment, others were written by great clan members. Given the pride Li Deyu took in his descent, is it plausible that he would have fabricated such a claim for a eunuch in the spirit road stele for Liu Honggui? It is also surprising that forged ancestry – other than adoption and marriage – is never leveled as criticism against them in other sources. If both eunuchs and spouses hold

a choronym, this lends further support to the truthfulness of those claims, as marriage alliances were usually forged between powerful families.

At the moment, it seems reasonable to assume that some eunuchs descended from low or mid-level officials that indeed held a choronym. Unfortunately, places of descent are not very helpful in identifying great clan membership, as the core members of the (in Nicolas Tackett's words) "national elite" had relocated to the metropolises of Chang'an, Luoyang, and the "Capital Corridor" in-between by the late eighth century. There were, however, still branches of the great clans that remained at their places of origin or settled down in the places of a provincial appointment, and did not rise to national prominence.

To some individuals, the choronym may have been awarded as a noble title (*jue* 爵) and used as a choronym in their own epitaphs and those of later generations. Here, the different genres of entombed epitaph and publically erected stele yield contradictory results. Noble titles also could only be handed down, if at all, over a limited number of generations. The connection between choronym (*wang*) and noble title is as yet unclear, but if there is a connection, we may have to rethink the concept of clan identity for the late Tang. The same is true for the concept of "adoption" (*yangzi* or *jiazi*), as these terms seem to cover a broad variety of customs, from adopting a legal heir to the most general form of political patronage. Here, further research on the pattern of adoptive networks in Tang epitaphs could yield some fascinating results.

¹ For Shundi's edict, see Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (12 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1973), 6.264 and 78.2518. If not otherwise noted, numbers at the end of references refer to pages. Editions of Chinese source texts are cited in the conventional manner of the traditional chapter (*juan* 卷) followed by page numbers and separated by a period without spaces.

² E.g., see Wu Ji 吳及 (?–?), “Lun huanguan yangzi” 論宦官養子, in Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137–1181), ed., *Song wenjian* 宋文鑑, *juan* 卷 46, in Yong Rong 永瑤 (1744–1790) et al., eds., *Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2003), vol. 1350: 479b–480b.

³ For *hezang* see Chen Jo-shui 陳弱水, *Tangdai de funü wenhua yu jiating shenghuo* 唐代的婦女文化與家庭生活 (Taipei: Yunchen Wenhua, 2007): 283–286 and Munford, T.F., “Till Death Do Us Unite: *Xunzang* and Joint Burial in Ancient China”, in *Papers on Far Eastern History* 27 (1983): 1–19

⁴ Zhu founded the Later Liang 後梁 Dynasty in 907 that ended almost 300 years of Tang rule a. He was aided from within the palace by the Grand Councillor Cui Yin 崔胤 (854–904), see Liu Xu 劉昫 (888–947) et al., *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 [hereafter: JTS] (16 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 1975), 20A.775 and Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) et al., *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (9th pr. 20 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1995 [1956]), 263.8595. Cui Yin was killed by Zhu one year later.

⁵ Tackett, Nicolas, *Tang Wudai renwu zhuanji yu shehui wangluo ziliaoku* 唐五代人物傳記與社會網絡資料庫 (1.0 版) (Prosopographic and Social Network Database of the Tang and Five Dynasties, version 1.0, tdb010.mdb, <http://history.berkeley.edu/people/nicolas-tackett>, last downloaded on May 18, 2016).

⁶ See JTS 184.4753–4779 and Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (996–1061), *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [hereafter: XTS] (20 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), 207:5855–208:5902.

⁷ They are also listed in Tackett's database. The main collections of excavated Tang epitaphs are Wu Gang 吳鋼, ed., *Quan Tangwen buyi* 全唐文補遺 [hereafter: QTB] (9 vols. Xi'an: San Qin 1994–2007), Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 and Zhao Chao 趙超, eds., *Tangdai muzhi huibian* 唐代墓誌彙編 [hereafter: TMH] (2 vols. 2nd pr. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1992), and idem, eds., *Tangdai muzhi huibian xujì* 唐代墓誌彙編續集 [TMX] (2nd pr. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2007 [2001]).

⁸ Yang's epitaph can be found in QTB, vol. 1: 146a–147b. The son's name is Yang Chengzong 楊承宗, and we have no reason to doubt that he was an agnatic relative of Sixu or even his biological son, whom he may have fathered before being castrated. Amy McNair, in an article on figurines in Sixu's tomb, mentions the tomb of another eunuch's wife, Lady Song 宋氏, which dates to 745, see “Beliefs about Sculpture: The Marble Guardsmen of the Court Eunuch Yang Sixu”, in *T'ang Studies* 25 (2007): 157–181 (164).

⁹ See Jay, Jennifer W., “Another Side of Chinese Eunuch History: Castration, Marriage, Adoption, and Burial”, in *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire* 28 (1993): 459–478 (460) and idem, “Castration and Medical Images of Eunuchs in Traditional China”, in Kim, Yung Sik, and Francisca Bray, eds., *Current Perspectives in the History of Science in East Asia* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1999), 385–394 (385).

¹⁰ For a list of terms for eunuchs see Cai Xingjuan 蔡幸娟, “Beichao huanguan zhidi yanjiu” 北朝宦官制度研究, Zheng Qinren jiaoshou rongtui jinian lunwenji bianji weiyuanhui 鄭欽仁教授榮退紀念論文集編輯委員會, eds., *Zheng Qinren jiaoshou rongtui jinian lunwenji* 鄭欽仁教授榮退紀念論文集 (Banqiao: Daoxiang Chubanshe: 1999), 81–122 (81, Fn. 1). I will not repeat the terms here, but only point out that the ubiquitous *taijian* 太監 is of much later origin and not applied in the early and mid-imperial period (before the Song 宋 [960–1279]).

¹¹ For an explanation of the term *sibai* see J[ohn] K[ennedy] Rideout, “The Rise of the Eunuchs during the T'ang, Part One (618–705),” in *AM* (new series) 1 (1949/50): 53–72 (55 & 66, n. 7). The term *yan'er* only appears twice in the “Biographies of Eunuchs” (“Huanzhe liezhuan” 宦者列傳), XTS 207.5858 and 5870, the latter instance quoted below.

¹² This gave rise to the popular and scholarly myth that most Tang eunuchs came from the South, see Chen Jo-shui 陳弱水, “Tangdai Chang'an de huanguan shequn – te lun qu yu junren de guanxi” 唐代長安的宦官社群——特倫其與軍人的關係, in *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究 15 (2009): 171–198.

¹³ See Rideout, “Eunuchs during the T'ang”: 55 & 66, n. 5 & 6.

¹⁴ See Chen, “Huanguan shequn” and Du Wenyu 杜文玉, “Tangdai huanguan de jiguan fenbu” 唐代宦官的籍貫分佈, *Zhongguo lishi dili luncong* 中國歷史地理論叢 1 (1998): 161–174.

¹⁵ Fan Ye and Li Xian 李賢 (651/ 54–684), *Hou Hanshu* [hereafter: HHS] (12 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1973), 78.2507–2543.

¹⁶ HHS 78.2507.

¹⁷ For a good summary of the sources and discussions in later periods, see Ho, Wing-chung Clara 劉詠聰, “Lun Chunqiu Siren Pi zhi pingjia” 論春秋寺人披之評價, in *Dalu zazhi* 大陸雜誌 89.6 (1994): 42–48.

¹⁸ HHS 78.2507.

¹⁹ HHS 78.2507.

²⁰ HHS 78.2507.

²¹ Written by the eunuch (*siren*) Mengzi 寺人孟子, see Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849), ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (8 vols. Taipei: Yiwen Yinshuguan, 2001), vol. 2: 428a–430a.

²² See Daniel F. Caner, “The Practice of Prohibition of Self-Castration in Early Christianity,” in *Vigiliae Christianae* 51, no. 4 (1997): 396–415 and Céline Grünhagen, *Geschlechterpluralismus im Buddhismus. Zur Tragweite westlicher Wissenschaftskonstruktionen am Beispiel frühbuddhistischer Positionen und des Wandels in Thailand* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 133–137.

²³ For instance: Du You 杜佑 (734–812) et al., *Tongdian* 通典 [hereafter: TD] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1988), 27.755.

²⁴ Jennifer Jay has identified the location of these stars as 60 Herculis GC 23061 and 34 LMi GC 14501 in “Another Side of Eunuch History”: 261, Fn. 4.

²⁵ See Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643) and Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 (583–666), *Suishu* 隨書 (6 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1973), 19.536: “The four eunuch stars are located to the southwest of the emperor’s seat, whence they attend as supervisors of castrates. If those stars are weak, it is auspicious; if they are bright, it forebodes calamity; if they lose their regularity, the eunuchs give cause for worries.” (宦者四星，在帝坐西南，侍主刑餘之人也。星微則吉，明則凶，非其常，宦者有憂。) Cf. Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578–648), *Jinshu* 晉書 (10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), 11.295.

²⁶ We do not know about any enforced divorces in cases in which castration was inflicted as a punishment.

²⁷ Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), “Ningxing zhuan” 佞幸傳, 93.3727.

²⁸ An earlier reference in *Shiji* is probably an interpolation, as it refers, anachronistically, to the eunuchs of the Han, see Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BC), *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), 58.2084.

²⁹ HHS 57.1855: “Furthermore, the Director of Eunuchs and eunuch gatekeepers also widely take wives.” (又常侍、黃門，亦廣妻娶。) Cf. Ulrike Jugel, *Politische Funktion und soziale Stellung der Eunuchen zur späten Han-Zeit (25–220 n. Chr.)* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976), 127.

³⁰ HHS 6:264 and 78:2518.

³¹ Zhao Gao 趙高 (d. 207), minister of the First and Second Emperor of the Qin 秦 Dynasty (221–206 BC), is the first eunuch ever recorded to have adopted a daughter, see Lang Ying 郎瑛 (1487–ca. 1566), *Qi xiu lei gao* 七修類稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), , 27.415. However, Zhao Gao’s status as a eunuch is contested, see Michael Loewe, “On the terms *baozi*, *yin gong*, *yin guan*, *huan*, and *shou*: Was Zhao Gao a Eunuch?,” in *T’oung Pao* 91 (2005): 301–319.

³² See Wu, “Lun huanguan yangzi”.

³³ See Jay, “Another Side”: 469–472.

³⁴ See Ho Koon-wan 何冠環, “Xiancun de sanpian Songdai neichen muzhiming” 現存的三篇宋代內臣墓誌銘, in *Journal of Chinese Studies* 中國文化研究所學報 52 (2011): 33–63 and Chiu Ling Yeung 趙令揚 and Leung Siu Kit 梁紹傑, *Mingdai huanguan beizhuanlu* 明代宦官碑傳錄 (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1997).

³⁵ Skaff, Jonathan Karam, *Sui-Tang China and Its Neighbors: Culture, Power, and Connections 580–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14 and 182.

³⁶ The only exception were abandoned children below the age of three, see Changsun Wuji 長孫無忌 et al., *Tanglü shuyi jianjie* 唐律疏議箋解 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1996), 12:941: 「即養異姓男者，徒一年；與者，笞五十。其遺棄小兒年三歲以下，雖異姓，聽收養，即從其姓。」

³⁷ TD 27:757: 「內侍五品以上，許養一子，仍以同姓者，初養日不得過十歲。」

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- ³⁸ See Johnson, David, “The Last Years of a Great Clan: the Li Family of Chao Chün in Late T’ang and Early Sung,” in *HJAS* 37.1 (1977): 5–102.
- ³⁹ See Fu Xuancong 傅璿琮 and Zhou Jianguo 周建國, eds., *Li Deyu wenji jiaojian* 李德裕文集校箋 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyu 1999/2000), 745–747.
- ⁴⁰ See Chen Zhong’an 陳仲安, “Tangdai houqi de huanguan shijia” 唐代後期的宦官世家, in *Zhongguo Tangshi xuehui* 中國唐史學會, ed., *Tangshi xuehui wenji* 唐史學會文集 (Xi’an: Shaanxi Renmin, 1986), 195–224 (197), Lu Yang 陸揚, “Cong beizhi ziliao kan jiu shiji Tangchao zhengzhi zhong de huanguan lingxiu – yi Liang Shouqian he Liu Honggui wei li” 從碑誌資料看 9 世紀唐朝政治中的宦官領袖——以梁守謙和劉弘規為例, in *Wenshi* 文史 4 (2010): 93–146 (96–98), and Du, “Huanguan jiguan”: 169–170.
- ⁴¹ See JTS 184.4757–4759, XTS 207.5858–5860, and QTB, vol. 1: 35b–37a and vol. 7: 59a–60b.
- ⁴² JTS 190B.5053.
- ⁴³ For *Ci Liu shi jiuwen* see Manling Luo, “Remembering Kaiyuan and Tianbao: The Construction of Mosaic Memory in Medieval Historical Miscellanies”, in *T’oung Pao* 97 (2011): 263–300 (272–279). There further is an *Outer Tradition of Gao Lishi* (*Gao Lishi waizhuan* 高力士外傳) by Guo Shi 郭湜 in one chapter that is listed in XTS 58:1484 and transmitted in *Gu shi wenfang xiaoshuo* 顧氏文房小說. See Wang Renyu 王仁裕 (880–956) and Ding Ruming 丁如明, *Kaiyuan Tianbao yishi shizhong* 開元天寶遺事十種 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji 1985), 115–123.
- ⁴⁴ See Du Wenyu, “Gao Lishi jiazu ji qi yuanliu” 高力士家族及其源流, in *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究 4 (1997): 175–197 (175). Du does not elaborate on this nor does he cite any sources, but the implication seems to be that it was broken on purpose.
- ⁴⁵ See Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiu suo 陝西省考古研究所, “Tang Gao Lishi mu fajue jianbao” 唐高力士墓發掘簡報, in *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古與文物 6 (2002): 21–32 (21). The accompanying burial (*peizang* 陪葬) is also mentioned in XTS 207.5860.
- ⁴⁶ See JTS 184.4757–59 and XTS 207.5858–60.
- ⁴⁷ See Hoeckelmann, Michael, “Castrations as a Substitute for the Death Penalty from Han to Tang,” under review.

⁴⁸ See JTS 184.4757, XTS 207.5858, and QTB, vol. 1: 35b and vol. 7: 59a.

⁴⁹ According to JTS 109.3287, this happened in the third year (620~621), according to XTS 111.4113 in the fifth year (622~623) of Gaozu's 高祖 (r. 618~626) Wude 武德 reign period, that is, at the very beginning of the Tang, when the dynasties grip over Southern China was still unstable.

⁵⁰ See JTS 109.3288. Other than Feng Ang, of course, Zhao Tuo did not submit to Han rule, but reigned for 67 years in his own right, even styling himself "Emperor Wen" 文帝. This comparison could also be a hint at the later fate of the Feng clan.

⁵¹ See Du, "Gao Lishi jiazu": 177.

⁵² See Li Zhengfen 李正奮, "Weishu yuanliu kao" 魏書源流考 (1929), cited in Jennifer Holmgren, "The Harem in Northern Wei Politics—398–498 A.D.: A Study of T'o-pa Attitudes Towards the Institution of Empress, Empress-Dowager, and Regency Governments in the Chinese Dynastic System During Early Northern Wei," in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 26 (1983): 71–96 (73).

⁵³ See below. It seems to have been a matter of convention not to mention the fact of castration.

⁵⁴ Both texts further contain some conspicuous sentences, though it would go too far to analyze them here. The one in the *muzhiming* reads 帝曰俞以汝為內侍高延福男, where *di* (emperor) refers to Wu Zetian, even though the text was written and inscribed under Emperor Daizong almost 60 years after Empress Wu's death and the restoration of the Tang. The *shendaobei* contains the following sentence: 則天……選內官而母之, which may indicate that the empress acted as a kind of foster or godmother for Lishi.

⁵⁵ Yanfu has a spirit path stele written by Zhang Yue 張說 (667–731), minister under Xuanzong, and tomb epitaph by Sun Yi 孫翌, preserved in *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 and *Quan Tangwen* 全唐文. See Dong Gao 董誥 (1740–1818), ed., *Quan Tangwen* [hereafter: QTW] (11 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983), 227.2298b–2299b and 305.3104a–3105a, and (for the stele) Li Fang 李昉 (925–996) et al., ed., *Wenyuan yinghua* [hereafter: WYYH] (6 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1966), 931.4896b–4897a.

⁵⁶ See QTB, vol. 7: 59a and Hoeckelmann, "Castration as a Substitution". Zhang Yue also wrote a stelae text, an epitaph, and a "prayer text" (*jiwen* 祭文) for Junheng, see QTW 230.2332b–2333b, 231.2341a–2342a, 233.2361b–2362a; cf. WYYH 913.4807b–4808b and 991.5209a.

⁵⁷ According to Tiezhang's *Suishu* biography (SS 64:1512), he was succeeded by his son Mengcai 孟才 as Duke of Su, so it is well possible that Mai actually was the great-great-granddaughter of Tiezhang.

⁵⁸ In other words, he did what every son-in-law who married into a lower-class family was expected to do. See JTS 184.4758 and XTS 207.58598–5859.

⁵⁹ QTB, vol. 7: 60a and vol. 1: 36b. The name of Chengyue is partly damaged on the the spirit path stele, leading to confusion about his name. Wang Shounan 王壽南, *Tangdai de huanguan* 唐代的宦官 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2004 [repr. of *Tangdai huanguan quanshi zhi yanjiu* 唐代宦官權勢之研究, Taipei: Zhengwu Shuju, 1971]), 32 has him as as Gao Liyue 高悅禮. According to QTB, vol. 1: 36b, the text reads as “Chengyue, in accordance with the rites, was named like(?) a son [...] to succeed him” (Chengyue, *li wei youzi* 承悅, 禮謂猶子口而繼之).

⁶⁰ See TMX 972–973 and 988.

⁶¹ See TMX 664 and He Hua 賀華, “Du ‘Tang Gao Yuangui muzhi’” 讀《唐高元珪墓誌》, in *Beilin jikan* 碑林集刊 n.v. (1995), 87–89.

⁶² See note 56 above and QTW 230.2333 and 231.2341b.

⁶³ The epitaph is found in the alternative anthology (*bieji* 別集) of Li's writings as “Tang gu zuo shence jun hujun zhongwei jian zuo jie gongde shi zhi neishi sheng shi Liu gong shendaobei” 唐故左神策軍護軍中尉兼左街功德使知內侍省事劉公神道碑, see Fu and Zhou, *Li Deyu wenji*, “bieji”, *juan* 6, 523–528.

⁶⁴ XTS 174.5222 (“Li Zongmin liezhuan” 李宗閔列傳): 「帝（穆宗）暴疾，中外阻遏，逢吉因中人梁守謙、劉弘規、王守澄議，請立景王（敬宗）為皇太子，帝不能言，頷之而已。」

⁶⁵ See Chen, “Huanguan shequn”: 179.

⁶⁶ See TMX 882–884: “Tomb Epitaph with Preface of the Former Protector-in-Chief of the Left Army of Divine Strategies, Concurrently Serving as Commissioner for the Cultivation of Merit of the Left Half of Chang'an, Specially Advanced Lord, Carrying out the Functions of Generalissimo of the Right Militant Guard and Administrator of the Palace Domestic Service, Supreme Pillar of State, Duke of Pei with an Income of 3000 Households, Posthumously Granted the Title of Commander Equal in Rank with the Three

Monitoring Ministers, Duke Liu (Honggui)” (d. 826/12/30) 故左神策軍護軍中尉兼左街功德使特進行右武衛上將軍知內侍省事上柱國沛國公食邑三千戶贈開府儀同三司劉公（弘規）墓誌銘并序。

⁶⁷ See Tackett, Nicolas, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), 35f.

⁶⁸ See Fn. 41 above.

⁶⁹ So called because the Tang founders tried to prohibit their intermarriage, to prevent the development of power networks that may tower over the imperial clan.

⁷⁰ See Fu and Zhou, *Li Deyu wenji*, 745–747.

⁷¹ Fu and Zhou, *Li Deyu wenji*, “bieji”, *juan* 6, 527 and TMX 883.

⁷² Fu and Zhou, *Li Deyu wenji*, “bieji”, *juan* 6, 523.

⁷³ Both are sons of Honggui’s second son, Liu Xingshen 劉行深, the only one mentioned several times in the historical sources. See Wang, *Tangdai de huanguan*, 176. Zhongli’s epitaph claims that he came from Pengcheng (彭城人也). Zhang Quanmin 張全民 is of the opinion that this claim of Pengcheng descent can only be fictive and is founded on the adoptive relationship with Xingshen, not on any biological descent. See Zhang, “Tang Hedong jianjun shi Liu Zhongli muzhi kaoshi” 唐河東監軍使劉中禮墓誌考釋, in *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊 2 (2007): 13–24 (16). Zhang bases his argument on the Chen, “Tangdai houqi de huanguan shijia”: 195–201. However, Chen’s analysis of three generations of Lius is more nuanced, and nowhere does he claim their Pengcheng Liu ancestry to be fictive.

⁷⁴ This was actually stipulated by Emperor Dezong in an edict of 791, see fn. 38 above.

⁷⁵ See JTS 177:4605–06 and XTS 181:5352–53. Zunli’s epitaph, which was both excavated and transmitted in literary sources, does not disclose his descent, but has the family name and choronym on its cover, and mentions Zunli’s enfeoffment as “Fief-opening Ciscount of Pengcheng County,” the same title as that of his uncle and Honggui’s eldest son, Xingli. See TMH 2434–2436.

⁷⁶ At the moment, I can only think of two possible explanations: either the ancestry was accepted because adoptive relationships were considered as real as biological one’s (a supposition borne out by legal texts since Han times); or there were some “aristocratic eunuchs” who adopted children from their (agnatic)

lineages, as indeed was stipulated by the Tang legal code as well as by provisions for eunuch adoptions in particular.

⁷⁷ His epitaph and that of his wife can be found in QTB, vol 2: 34a–37a. Cf. TMX 799–801.

⁷⁸ TMX 1039–1040, 1048–1049, and TMH 2119–2120.

⁷⁹ See TMH 2119–2120.

⁸⁰ In-between, there are Yang Qinyi 楊欽義, who rose to prominence when Li Deyu was chancellor in the 840s, and Yang Xuanlüe 楊玄略, a grandson of Zhilian. Xuanlüe's epitaph states that he was the son of Qinyi, but he is not listed among Qinyi's sons in Yang Fugong's *Jiu Tangshu* biography. The epitaph of Xuanlüe and those of two other Hongnong Yang eunuchs who fall into the same generation as Qinyi and Xuanlüe, but as yet do not fit clearly into the Yang family tree, treat their Hongnong Yang ancestry as a matter of fact just as Liu Honggui's treated his Pengcheng Liu ancestry.

⁸¹ See XTS 207.5875 and 208.5889.

⁸² It is unclear if that means he was castrated on the behest of his adoptive father, his biological father sent him to undergo the procedure, or his father was even castrated together with his son.

⁸³ So far, there is only one scholar who doubts that all members of the *neishisheng* were eunuchs, see Yan Yaozhong 严耀中, “Tangdai zhonghouqi neishisheng guanyuan shenfen zhiyi” 唐代中后期内侍省官员身份质疑, *Shilin* 史林 5 (2004): 77–81. His argument is strictly *ex silentio* and hence the reverse of the point made above, namely that not all members are labeled as eunuchs.

⁸⁴ They use phrases like *wen wu bu zhui* 文武不墜, *you wen you wu* 有文有武, *wen wu jie quan* 文武皆全, *wen wu bei ti* 文武備體, sometimes mention their Confucian or Buddhist learning, and list their military exploits as in the case of Liu Honggui or Yang Sixu (see McNair, “Beliefs about Sculpture”).

⁸⁵ See Ditter, Alexei, „The Commerce of Commemoration: Commissioned *Muzhiming* in the Mid- to Late Tang“, in TS 32 (2014): 21–46.