The Treaty of Shanyuan from the Perspectives of Western Scholars1

Hoyt Cleveland Tillman
Arizona State University

Abstract

In marking the 1000th anniversary of the Treaty of Shanyuan between the Song dynasty and the Khitan Liao dynasty in January 1005, the author surveys Western scholarship on the treaty and how it reflects the overall development of Chinese studies in the West, especially in North America. After using the work of John K. Fairbank as a backdrop for mid-twentieth century views of Imperial China’s world order, the author discusses the research findings of Karl A. Wittfogel, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, Morris Rossabi, Wang Guoguo, Tao Jinghe, Herbert Franke, Dennis Tintelott, Klaus Peter Tietz, and Frederick Moto. Professors Wang and Tao are Chinese, but they earned their graduate degrees in the West, and their publications in English have exercised considerable influence in the West. Thus, this is a case study of changing Western perspectives on China’s foreign relations.

Keywords: China’s foreign relations, Song dynasty, Liao dynasty, American Sinology, Tribute System

Introduction

The aspect of Imperial China’s foreign relations that attracted Western scholars’ attention for decades was the Tribute System and Chinese assumptions about “barbarians,” i.e., peoples living in areas not directly under the cultural influence and political administration of China’s Son of Heaven [tianzi]. Since Chinese regarded barbarian states as inferiors, Chinese permitted and controlled trade, but only in order to ensure barbarian submission. China was portrayed as being in a hegemonic position vis-à-vis its neighbors. China’s Son of Heaven was unique, and China thus conducted foreign relations on its own terms, a Tribute System in which others kowtowed and offered gifts to China’s emperors from the Han dynasty until the Opium Wars during the Qing dynasty. Only if China stopped bestowing gifts and allowing trade under the Tribute System, would Central Asian tribes be forced to use their troops to challenge Chinese hegemony. Thus, until forced by treaties ending the Opium Wars in the mid-nineteenth century, China did not recognize others as equals or even as real nation states.2
These traditional Western assumptions were slightly modified, but still reinforced, in a famous scholarly volume, *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations*, edited by John K. Fairbank and published in 1968. On the one hand, taking into account Wang Gengwu’s essay on Southeast Asia and Joseph Fletcher’s essay on Inner Asia, which demonstrated how the Ming and Qing had to be somewhat flexible in dealing with those distant states, Professor Fairbank acknowledged the gap between the ideal of the tribute system and actual practice: “All these non-Chinese states and peoples were expected in theory to be properly tributary to the Son of Heaven in the Central Country, but the theory frequently was not observed in fact. Indeed, the chief problem of China’s foreign relations was how to square theory with fact, the ideological claim with the actual practice.” Indeed, in the one essay dealing with the period before the Ming, Professor Yang Liangsheng even briefly portrayed the Song dynasty’s annual payments to the Liao and the Jin as “tribute in reverse.” However, on the other hand, Professor Fairbank’s dominant voice in the volume reiterated and reinforced some old assumptions about Chinese foreign relations: “The relations of the Chinese with surrounding areas, and with non-Chinese peoples generally, were colored by this concept of Sinocentrism and an assumption of Chinese superiority. — China’s foreign relations were accordingly hierarchic and nonegalitarian, like Chinese society itself.” Furthermore, as evident in another of his book titles, *China: The People’s Middle Kingdom and the U.S.A.*, Professor Fairbank regarded New China as essentially a continuation of Imperial China. Although the impact of the West had destroyed the Tribute System, Fairbank apparently expected China’s leaders not only to enhance China’s position in world affairs but also to strive toward a position of uniqueness or superiority whenever and wherever possible. Against this general background about American scholarship, my essay will illustrate how research on Song-Liao relations, and particularly the Treaty of Shanyuan, has gradually challenged and modified traditional Western assumptions about Imperial China’s foreign relations and American expectations for the PRC’s foreign relations.

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**Views of the Shanyuan Treaty**

Knowledge of the Treaty of Shanyuan has slowly developed, along with an increasingly broad understanding of Chinese history, in the West since the 1940s. I have chosen to provide some sense of this development by discussing the most important publications in a roughly chronological order. It will become apparent that early accounts in English provided relatively little details about the treaty and the larger context or events leading up to the treaty; however, by the early 1990s, a quite thorough account became available. Accounts in the early 1980s were also more balanced in their discussions of the treaty in particular, as well as Song-Liao foreign relations in general, than earlier accounts had been. My survey will include important studies done by Professor Wang Gengwu and Tao Jinheng. Although ethnically and culturally Chinese, these two scholars earned their graduate degrees from British and American universities respectively; moreover, the studies discussed below were written in English and directed to Western audiences. Furthermore, these two scholars have provided English readers with the most thorough accounts and interpretations of the Treaty of Shanyuan. In the West, the treaty is referred to as “Shanyuan” instead of “Chanyuan,” so I have maintained that spelling throughout. Although Chinese date the treaty from the last month of 1004, almost all Western scholars use the year of 1005 because the Chinese dates for the conclusion of the treaty correspond to January 13–18, 1005 in the modern Western calendar.

Even before Professor Fairbank published *The Chinese World Order* in 1968, there were already some studies of Song-Liao relations and the Treaty of Shanyuan that suggested some of the complexities of Imperial China’s foreign relations; however, the issue of the Tribute System dominated these early studies almost as much as it did Fairbank’s thinking. Most importantly, Karl A. Wittfogel and Feng Jisheng’s landmark 1949 study, *History of Chinese Society: The Liao*, had provided an important beginning point of reference for Western understanding of Liao relations with the Song. Professor Wittfogel characterized Song-Liao relations as “balanced hostility” because neither state was strong enough to subjugate the other. He also emphasized Song loss of prestige when unable to respond in 991 to an appeal from the Jurchens for help against the Liao. Although noting that Song sources do not speak of the annual payments to the Liao as “tribute” (gong), he pointed to Liao sources (the Liaoshi and also a 1031 inscription) that do claim the payments were tribute.’ Thus, Professor

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1 From September 2003 through December 2004, my research in China on the Song, Liao, Jin and Yuan periods was graciously supported by grants from the William J. Fulbright Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies (which received part of its funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities). This essay was presented at a December 2005 conference on the treaty, held in Puyang, Henan, and a Chinese version is forthcoming in a volume edited by Zhang Xiqing to be published by Shanghai’s People’s Press in 2006. Margaret Tillman edited this article manuscript.

2 For an overview of this conventional view, see Rossabi, 1983: Introduction, 1-4.


Wittfogel tended to regard the treaty as giving the Liao the upper hand. In a 1959 German monograph on the Treaty of Shanyuan, Dr. Christian Schwarz-Schilling presented the annual payments by the Song as compensation for the Liao giving up its claims to the Guannan area in central Hebei, which had been ceded to the Liao by the Later Jin in 938, but liberated by the Chinese in 959. However, a review by Professor A. Hulsewé made many corrections to the account in this monograph. Although this monograph is the only Western-language book focused solely on the treaty, it has never been widely read since it was written in German.

Traditional Western assumptions were directly challenged by a 1983 volume edited by Morris Rossabi, China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries, which was based upon papers from a 1978 conference. Debunking the myth of a continuous Tribute System in Imperial China, Professor Rossabi emphasized that the Song was realistic in its foreign policy and flexible in its dealings with foreigners. Suggesting that such realism was grounded in China's weakness, he traced weaknesses back to 751 when the Arabs defeated the Tang at the Talas River, and the Nan-chao state in Yunnan forced the Tang to withdraw from the Southwest. Moreover, the Tang could suppress the An Lushan Rebellion only with the aid of Uighur troops, and the Tang was further weakened by the rise of Regional Commanders (jiedushi), many of whom were non-Han peoples. The traditional Chinese position became even weaker during the division of the Five Dynasties (mostly foreign or non-Han) in North China and the Ten Kingdoms of South China, so the traditional system was disrupted. The Ten Kingdoms deferred to dynasties in the North primarily in order to leverage their own struggles with rivals in the South. These kingdoms, like the Wu Yue, did not insist that Japanese or Koreans follow the Tribute System, but rather, actively sought trade. The Wu Yue Kingdom also accepted tribute status to the Khitans, so a Chinese state had already offered tribute to the Khitan dynasty. Although the Song subdued Central and South China before the end of the 10th century, it still had to contend with the Khitans; thus, as Wang Gengwu's essay argues, the Song came to power as a "lesser empire." In the 1005 Shanyuan Treaty, the Song achieved peace along the frontier in exchange for payments of 200,000 bolts of silk and 100,000 taels of silver. Rossabi reasons: "By the very act of signing the treaty, the Song acknowledged that the Khitans had achieved diplomatic parity with them." In reality, Khitans were treated as equals; however, in statements for domestic audiences, the Song still employed the comforting, if misleading, language of the Tribute System. In short, Professor Rossabi presented the Shanyuan treaty as the best example of a true multi-state system under the Song.

The degree of equality declined as the Song had to increase its payments to the Liao in 942 to 500,000 units. The Song's relations with the Jurchen Jin were even less equal. Still, the principle of multi-state power in China remained. But the Mongol conquest changed all this. Song flexibility was replaced by Mongol dominance and insistence upon actual subordination of surrounding states like the Tibetans and Uighurs. The myth of the Tribute System began to become a reality only after the foreign Mongol conquest of China.

Indeed, the Chinese Song dynasty "could not impose a Chinese world order", besides conceding diplomatic parity with the Liao and then the Jin, the Song "could not prevent such traditional tributary states as Korea from paying allegiance to a 'barbarian' power," i.e., the Liao and then the Jin. Thus, the Koreans and the Tibetans ceased to offer tribute to the Song. As Gari Ledyard's essay sets forth, Chinese foreign relations followed two trends: During a yang phase of Chinese state strength, China could enforce the Tribute System, during a yin phase of relative Chinese state weakness, China had to accept foreign states as equals. Thus, the Shanyuan Treaty represented the accommodation that characterized foreign relations during a yin phase.

Herbert Franke's essay calls attention to the care given to the selection and work of Song envoys. Moreover, the envoys' travels provided information and military intelligence that enabled the Song to make realistic judgments regarding whether to deal with envoys from particular states either as equals or as subordinates. Professor Franke also provided a general assessment of the Shanyuan treaty: "Diplomatic relations through traveling envoys, as sanctioned by the Shanyuan treaty of 1005, also characterized contacts between the Song and the Jin. Song sources repeatedly stress the importance of following Liao precedents with the Jin, which regarded itself as the legitimate successor of the Liao... After the resumption of peaceful relations with the Jin in 1141, relations between the two states followed-with occasional interruptions-the pattern established by the treaty of Shanyuan, which must therefore be regarded as crucial in the history of Song foreign relations."

Wang Gengwu’s essay provided a particularly strong challenge to traditional views of the Tribute System. He first categorizes the kinds of Tang rhetoric for dealing with foreign states: (1) language largely moral, cosmological and inclusive; (2) rhetoric of tribute; (3) derogatory language justifying use of force; (4) routine communications stressing realism and flexibility—techniques to “hold a loose rein” [jinsi]; and (5) rhetoric of contractual relations. Professor Wang then sought to show how the Song gradually realized that the flexibility of “holding a loose rein” could still permit it to use Tribute System language for domestic consumption. Song relations with the Liao were at first, from 974 to 979, peaceful and equal, but the Song regarded such equality as only a temporary expedient. Still, during these five years, there were friendly exchanges of envoys and gifts. Professor Wang hailed this early period: “What emerges clearly is that the relationship was based principally on the exchange of gifts between equals.” Only in 978 and early 979 were the envoys bringing gifts described as “coming to offer tribute” [lai gong], but such wording is found only in domestic Song sources. The year 979 was the climax of Song power when it blocked the Khitan relief force and seized the Khitan ally, the Northern Han. When the Song was defeated in 780 in its attempt to seize the Sixteen Prefectures around Yanjing (modern Beijing), Song power receded, and other border states became more independent. During these tense years, Zhang Ji set forth his advice in a 988 memorial: “to put away one’s armor and bows and use humble words and send generous gifts, to send a princess to obtain friendship, to transport goods in order to establish bonds in order to establish firm bonds; although this would diminish the emperor’s dignity, it could for a while end fighting along the three borders.” But Zhang justified such a policy not out of weakness, as during the Han dynasty, but as a necessary expedient for dealing with “serpents and swine,” as when Tang Taizong’s dealt with the Turks. But the Khitans mounted a war in 1004 and seized Song territory.

In Professor Wang’s words, “The war ended predictably with a series of Song defeats, and a humiliating ‘treaty of alliance was signed. The Song did not have to send a princess to the Liao, but everything else was based on the diplomacy that Zhang Ji had recommended.” Each side claimed that the other had asked to end conflict, and the scarcity of, and contradictions in, existing evidence makes it impossible to settle such claims; however, Professor Wang emphasized that it was the Song that “bought off the Khitans with an annual subsidy of silks and silver.” Professor Wang further argues that what is more important were the diplomatic steps that led to the treaty and the rhetoric the Song “used to justify submission.” Although the Song used old rhetoric for internal consumption, the emperor was careful in his statements to the Khitan envoy: he spoke of bringing “peace and security to the people,” rather than “controlling animals.”

Nonetheless, Professor Wang praised the Shanyuan treaty not only for establishing a peace that lasted almost 120 years but also for its degree of equality. He wrote:

Liao’s relations with the Song were the nearest thing to equality in Chinese history until modern times. This exceptional equality was based on the claims of both states to use Tang rhetoric, and some of the new procedures, therefore, had to be clothed in neutral language. But by adopting kinship terms like ‘elder’ and ‘younger brother,’ ‘uncle’ and ‘nephew,’ ‘grand-uncle’ and ‘grand-nephew,’ some of the old rhetoric could still be preserved. In particular, the equality was carefully treated by the Song rulers as unique to their relations with the Liao, and this enabled them to maintain some of the majesty expected of them in their dealings with other states.

Thus, Professor Wang apparently regarded the use of family terminology in the treaty as a Song effort to regain some of the equality and prestige the Song lost by offering the annual payments to the Liao. Illustrating this Song discomfort with the treaty through Song efforts to blur the reality of relations with the Liao, Professor Wang explored the rhetoric of the Cefu yuangei by Wang Qimao and other Song scholar-officials. For instance, one of the Prefaces in this Song collection sought to discuss sworn oaths [jimen] on the basis of a precedent in the Tang treaty with Tibet in 785; although the Tang was reluctant, Tibet insisted on equality of alliance. From this discussion, Professor Wang concluded:

The authors of the Preface knew that the Song-Khitans treaty in 1005 was sworn between equals, all letters of greeting were written between equals, annual ‘gifts’ of silks and silver had been negotiated, or rather bargained for,
with such great difficulty that they could easily be described as Song tribute to the Liao. Yet the Preface could portray the sworn oath as something connected with other states paying tribute to China.  

In short, Professor Wang presented the Song as realistic and flexible in signing the treaty, but Song officials still struggled with the Song’s decline of prestige and status. Old Tang rhetoric and myths about China’s superiority over barbarian states thus provided comfort to a lesser empire.

Tao Jinshen’s essay was later revised and incorporated into his chapter on the Shanyuan treaty in his book, Two Sons of Heaven: Studies of Song-Liao Relations. Compared to the contributors to Rossabi’s volume, Professor Tao set forth in his book a much earlier and longer Chinese tradition of relations based on diplomatic equality. In addition to the multi-state system during the Eastern Zhou when “major states dealt with each other on an equal footing,” Professor Tao argued that relations were based on equality several other times before the Song: the Han dynasty’s relations with the Xiongnu; the Southern Dynasties’ relations with the Northern Wei; much of the Tang’s relations with Turks and Tibetans; and most of the Five Dynasties’ relations with the Khitan. Thus, China had a long tradition of following - when necessary - pragmatic and flexible policies in foreign relations.

Professor Tao also highlighted the equality expressed in Song-Liao relations during the 974 to 979 period that was first disrupted by Song military invasions. In its direct communications with the Liao in 974, the Song expressed the hope that the “two states” (er guo) would be “eternal allies” (yu guo). During the next five years, there was a peaceful exchange of envoys and state letters (guo shu). However, in 980 and 986, the Song mounted two invasions to regain the Sixteen Prefectures around Yanjing, but Song forces encountered disastrous defeats. In 1004, the Khitan invaded and seized a few towns. Although Zhenzong led the Song army to Poyang, he also made an overture to Wang Jiuzong, a former Song general who had been captured by the Khitans. In response, the Khitans demanded the return of the Guannan area in central Hebei. When Zhao Kuanyi (who later reigned as Song Taizu) served as a general for the Later Zhou in 559, he had seized this area (three strategic passes and ten counties) from the Liao.

In the Treaty of Shanyuan in 1005, the Song provided silk and silver as “military compensation” to the Khitan for the Guannan area. This compensation was referred to in the treaty as “annual payments” (sui bi). Tao addressed the question: Why did the Song, without taking major military action, agree to such a “humiliating treaty”? The answer was: the Song emperor and most of his officials were so frightened that they considered the deal to be a real bargain. Professor Tao apparently agreed that the Song gained a bargain. In addition to dispensing with a serious military threat, the Song regained control of part of Hebei that could have been lost, moreover, the peace saved lives and resources. He acknowledges that the Song was essentially “blackmailed into paying a handsome annual ransom.” Strictly speaking, the payments were not tribute because the Song only delivered them to the Liao border, and no official letter or envoys accompanied the payments to the Liao capital. Moreover, even though the Liao internally referred to the payments as “tribute,” the Khitan “cleverly refrained from imposing such a term on the Song court.” In short, the Song regarded China’s territorial integrity as more important than the payments.

In addition to the annual payments, other aspects of the treaty present a complex picture regarding equality between the two states. One the one hand, there were strong implications for parity. The treaty provided for the Song and Liao to address each other’s ruler as “emperor”; furthermore, trade and diplomacy arising from the treaty were handled with equity. Trade at border cities was not accompanied by tribute, so the transaction of trade can be considered as one between equals. Moreover, in the fictive kinship relations that strengthened the pact, seniority—not status-determined the terms used. On the other hand, Professor Tao said, “Song attempts to maintain a brotherly relationship was aimed at achieving diplomatic equality.” Even though Song diplomacy toward the Liao was marked by equality, the rigorous efforts by the Song to achieve and maintain that equality suggest an awareness that the treaty itself put the Song at an unequal disadvantage. Thus, Professor Tao’s discussion reveals such tension:

The Song did not gain any superiority over the Khitan in these diplomatic exchanges, although their envoys generally held lower official ranks than the Khitan diplomats. Song envoys and host officials were carefully selected, perhaps to display the cultural superiority of the Chinese. They were outstanding scholars, witty and eloquent, and according to Song records, are said
to have outwitted the Khitans. But if they acted improperly at the Khitan court or when they were escorting Khitan envoys, they were punished. All these efforts to ensure diplomatic parity can be seen as face-saving measures to compensate for the unequal Treaty of Shanyuan.\(^{27}\) (Emphasis mine)

In this culminating sentence, Professor Tao clearly expresses his judgment: the Song Chinese felt a loss of face and regarded the treaty as essentially unequal. Moreover, in his comments on Zhenzong’s subsequent quest for omens and performance of extravagant rituals on Mt. Tai in 1008, Professor Tao suggests that the Song emperor sought “to compensate for his diplomatic setback” and “for losses deriving from the Treaty of Shanyuan.”\(^{28}\)

The tension over diplomatic equality was also reflected in language used as Professor Tao detailed more fully in his earlier essay for Morris Rossabi’s volume. Following the treaty, a new language of equality evolved with the Song and Liao referring to one another as the “Northern Dynasty” [Bei Chao] and the “Southern Dynasty” [Nan Chao]. Song official writings often referred to the northern dynasty as the Great Liao or the Great Khitans. Moreover, rules of etiquette for visiting Khitans differed from those for other foreigners. Nonetheless, although Fan Zuyu spoke of foreign peoples as human beings and condemned aggressive wars to achieve unification of lost territories, other Song scholars continued using disparaging language about barbarians as being animals.\(^{29}\) Moreover, some Song officials, such as Zhang Fangping’s “Hymn to the Song [Song song]” could portray the Shanyuan treaty as a glorious Song victory achieving “the submission of the barbarians.”\(^{30}\) Still, Song men were practical enough to deal with Liao on basis of parity in official relations and to abide by the provisions of the Shanyuan treaty.

In his overall evaluation, Professor Tao offers a balanced assessment of the Shanyuan treaty. On the one hand, he hails the treaty as an epoch-making event in China’s relations with foreign states; moreover, it reflected Chinese pragmatism and flexibility. Thus, he contrasted Song emperors to those of the late Qing who clung tenaciously to an outmoded principle of superiority in international politics.\(^{31}\) Furthermore, the treaty benefited both states economically. Besides receiving needed resources to purchase Chinese goods, the Khitans used the funds to construct the Central Capital in Jehol (Rehe). Although the payments burdened the Song, they amounted to only about 1% to 2% of military expenses incurred during war; moreover, peace with the Khitan enabled the Song to focus on developing its domestic economy and culture. On the other hand, he points to negative aspects:

The influence of the Treaty of Shanyuan, however, was by no mean entirely positive. The treaty represented at least in part a form of appeasement, reflecting a withdrawal, although temporary, from the Chinese stance of superiority and a (turn toward) seeking of comfort. With the lapse of time, the Chinese grew accustomed to a life of ease and no longer favored an active foreign policy. Su Shi once remarked that the peace of Shanyuan was the worst policy a Chinese dynasty could have ever adopted and that as long as the two enemies in the north and in the west were suffered to exist, no Chinese dynasty could ever attain real peace \([^\text{zh\u0122}].\) Some modern historians have felt that the causes of the final destruction of the Song dynasty by the Mongols can be traced to its early years, when its leaders failed to address the perennial problem of foreign threat along the northern borders of the Chinese world.\(^{32}\)

However, Professor Tao quickly balanced such negative judgments: “Song foreign policy, however, was closely tied to domestic goals, which included the resolution of problems concerning internal control and the centralization of political, economic, and military power. Therefore, its conduct of foreign policy should not be considered the only reason for the eventual collapse of the Song dynasty.”\(^{33}\)

In Thomas J. Barfield’s The Perilous Frontier, attention returned to the Liao side of Song-Liao relations. Barfield characterizes both the Liao and the Jin as “conservative Manchurian states with dual administrations”, by “conservative,” he meant that the Liao restricted its own territorial ambitions in its relations with the Song and the Xi Xia. His discussion of the Shanyuan treaty highlighted how the treaty enabled the Khitan to shift troops and supplies toward northern frontiers in order to subdue Korea and Pohai, as well as the Jin and the Khitans.\(^{34}\) Furthermore, the treaty benefited both states economically. Besides receiving needed resources to purchase Chinese goods, the Khitans used the funds to construct the Central Capital in Jehol (Rehe).
History series generally gives a solid account of the state of the field's understanding of periods and large topics; thus, the discussion of the treaty primarily summarized the facts of the war and negotiations leading to the treaty, as well as the terms of the treaty. In their analysis, Twitchett and Tietz portrayed the war as ending in a military stalemate; moreover, they highlighted the significance of discussing "a contribution to military expenses" as a way to avoid the implication of "tribute". They further noted how the payments were thus delivered only to the border by a low-level official in order to avoid presenting the payments, as tribute, directly or personally to the Liao court; moreover, similar careful protocols were established in the "fictitious kinship relationship" expressed between the emperors, as well as in the decorum and gift exchanges that were observed between the two imperial families. Rejecting the claim that the payments were a burden to the Song, Twitchett and Tietz reiterated that the annual payments amounted to no more than the tax revenue from a single southern prefecture, like Yuezhou. Moreover, about 60% of the annual payments were returned to the Song to offset Liao's necessary imports from the Song. The payments obviously benefited the Liao by enabling them to build their Central Capital and to use the Song imports in Liao trade and relations with its own neighbors. Thus, the treaty was "a good bargain for both parties" and established an exchange that benefited both sides. Overall, Twitchett and Tietz praised the treaty as a pragmatic achievement that transcended demands of ideology; moreover, despite the tensions of 1042 and 1074-1076, the terms of the treaty were still respected for over a century. Significantly, a clearly demarcated international border stretching from the Yellow Sea to the Yellow River was established between the Song and the Liao, such a clear international boundary was unprecedented in Chinese history. Its short, the treaty contributed to the peace and prosperity of both states.

Frederick Mote's discussion of the Shanyuan treaty in his *Imperial China, 900-1800* also built upon earlier scholarship and, as a textbook for the period, probably has (along with the Cambridge History) the widest influence on EuroAmerican views of Song-Liao relations. Professor Mote contributes entertaining accounts of the struggles between the war and peace parties within the Song government, as well as the military conflicts between the Song and the Liao. Within these accounts, he repeatedly characterized Emperor Zhenzong as "fearful and indecisive," "cautious" and "vacillating," and "terrified." Within this context, his discussion of the treaty highlighted the Song's annual payments to the Liao. For instance, he wrote: "The idea of paying the Khitan to go away seems to have originated with the Chinese court." Professor Mote also reiterated the stories about how elated Zhenzong was to win such a "clever bargain" because the emperor had expected to have to pay ten times as much as the agreed amount; moreover, some Song officials boasted about being able to "secure a century of peaceful relations." Professor Mote also observed that the Khitans accepted the deal without much hesitation because they regarded the amounts as very large and focused on the fact that the payments would come annually. Even though he mentioned aspects for parity when summarizing the terms of the treaty, Professor Mote focused on the payments and what they meant to the Song economy. His assessment of the treaty highlights the "lessons" learned by both sides. The pattern of indemnified peace established by the Treaty of Shanyuan was thereafter central to Song China's relations with the Liao, the Xi Xia, and the Jin conquest dynasties. The Inner Asian states learned to threaten war, demand territory, or require other concessions, and the Song learned to resist most of these demands by paying even higher indemnities. Professor Mote's choice of the word "indemnities" to refer to the annual payments highlighted the official nature of the compensation paid by the Song and implies that the Song lost the war with the Liao.

Conclusion

Scholars who have made important assessments of the Shanyuan treaty include major specialists on the history of the period. It is interesting that most of focus on this treaty - written in English - comes either from Chinese who received their graduate education abroad, like Professors Wang and Tao, or from German scholars, like Professors Wittfogel, Schwarz-Schilling, Franke, and Tietz. Although this is just an isolated case, it does provide a graphic example of the importance of Chinese and Germans in Western scholarship, written in English, on China.

The perspectives of the various scholars appear to reflect to a considerable degree their particular period or area of specialization. Scholars of Liao or Inner Asian history tend to emphasize the Liao's perspective and to present payments as tribute in reality, if not always in name. Karl Wittfogel and Thomas Barfield highlight the way the treaty helped the Liao to solidify its power and

35 Twitchett and Tietz, 1994: 107-110
36 Mote, 1999: 70, 111, 115.
expand its influence over other peoples, particularly the Jurchens and Koreans. Frederick Mote, a scholar of the Yuan and Ming, uses even stronger language of "indemnities" offered by the fearful Song emperors who were "paying the Khitans to go away." Wang Gengwu and Tao Jinshen, as Chinese scholars, focus more than their Euro-American counterparts on the reasoning behind Song decisions and on the impact upon the Song. Both Professors Wang and Tao see positive benefits of peace to the Song, and they regard the Song as being practical or pragmatic in accepting a "humiliating" treaty. For instance, Professor Wang analyzes how Song officials rationalized their concessions and adopted Tribute System language to "comfort" themselves for their losses. Tao includes criticisms of the treaty that build upon criticisms voiced by some scholars during the Song itself. Denis Twitchett, as a Tang historian, emphasizes the advantages of the treaty to both the Song and the Liao; moreover, he regards the payments to the Liao as posing no significant burden on the Song. While Professor Tao cautions about some negative effects of the treaty, Professor Twitchett has a more thoroughly positive assessment of the treaty for both parties.

Against the background of traditional Western assumptions that Imperial China's Tribute System and World Order dominated its relations with foreign states for about two thousand years before the Opium Wars, studies of Song-Liao relations and the Treaty of Shanyuan have presented China as at times having complex and pragmatic traditions for dealing with other states. Indeed, there is rather widespread agreement that the Treaty of Shanyuan represented the high water mark of interstate equality between Chinese and foreign states before modern times. Morris Rossabi is the most explicit in using the diplomatic equality between the Song and the Liao as a counter to conventional Western assumptions about the Tribute System and Chinese hegemonistic superiority over other countries. Professor Tao places such equal relations in the broadest spectrum of history, going back to the relationships between states in the Eastern Zhou and extending even to the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk when the Kangxi emperor of the Qing recognized Russia as another sovereign state.

In some of these discussions of Imperial China's relations with other states in the past, there are implicit concerns or expressions about the People's Republic of China's evolving stance in diplomatic relations. In the 1960s, John Fairbank's work reveals an apparent concern that Imperial China's Tribute System had given China a legacy for hegemonistic aspirations. By the time of China's expanding international relations and trade in the 1980s, Morris Rossabi's China Among Equals challenged such Western views and emphasized Chinese pragmatic and flexible foreign policies through many periods of traditional China. Still, Professor Tao acknowledged humiliating aspects of the Treaty of Shanyuan that caused Song Zhenzong to feel that he had to perform extravagant rituals to compensate for losses in prestige at Shanyuan. Professor Mote went even further by focusing on the "frightened and indecisive" emperor offering "indemnities" to the Liao. As such, Professor Mote's recent book pays much less attention than Professors Rossabi, Tao, and Wang to aspects of parity and equality in the treaty or in Song-Liao relations; furthermore, on this point, Professor Mote reveals the continuing impact of the traditional focus on tribute. However, Professor Twitchett's emphasis, in the Cambridge History of China, on the mutual benefits of the treaty to both the Song and the Liao reflects, I think, a more widely held view among scholars in the West in recent years. The Cambridge History of China generally represents the state of the field and a fair consensus of scholarship at the time the chapters are written. In short, the overall progression evident from Fairbank's China's World Order to both Rossabi's China Among Equals and Twitchett's chapter in the Cambridge History of China certainly reflects the growing understanding of Chinese history among scholars in the West. Moreover, such positive evaluations of the roots of multi-state relations based upon considerable diplomatic equality also reflected the improving relationships between China and the West since the 1970s.

Historically, the Treaty of Shanyuan is a particularly noteworthy case when China had to adjust its ideological expectations. The Khitans, as a steppe people, required food and other goods from the agriculturally productive area of China and Korea in order to balance their reliance on fishing and hunting on the steppe where a long winter climate and inadequate water resources made it difficult to sow grain to feed their people. In earlier centuries, if such steppe peoples did not receive the food and goods that they needed for subsistence on the steppe, their only options were either to raid frontier settlements to seize what was needed, or to submit to the "Tribute System" in return for the food-stuffs and goods. Of course, China preferred a tribute system that promoted its idealized status as center of civilization and governance. Historians, such as Professor Rossabi, have praised the adjustments, to which the Song agreed at Shanyuan, as realistic, but others in his edited volume caution that such adjustments were merely a "necessary expedient" forced upon a "lesser empire." Moreover, whereas Professor Rossabi highlighted the equality of Song-Liao relations in the treaty, both Professors Tao and Wang emphasized the humiliation that Chinese felt about the treaty, Song actions and writings to counter that humiliation, and their efforts to interject more equality and/or status advantage into the Song's dealings with the Liao.
Various terms used to discuss Song payments to the Liao reflect differing perspectives. In early Western scholarship dominated by images of the Tribute System, Wittfogel and others focused on the issue of "tribute"; moreover, Professor Yang even spoke of "tribute in reverse" to describe the Song payments to the Liao. In Ronahi's volume, several scholars distinguished traditional tribute per se from the Song payments; moreover, they used more neutral sounding term, "annual payments," as expressed in the language of the treaty itself. Still, Professor Tao could also speak in more anguish-laden terms of the "annual ransom" paid by the Song. By the time of the Cambridge History volume, Professor Twitchett was using even more neutral or face-saving terms of the Song's "contribution to military expenses" incurred by the Liao. Nevertheless, our latest major commentator on the treaty, Professor Mote, interpreted the term "indemnities" to highlight his presentation of the Song as the party requesting the peace and taking responsibility for the war.

Despite Professor Mote's choice of terms, the overall impression that this evolution of terminology yields is one of progress both in appreciating Chinese sensibilities and in portraying the treaty as mutually beneficial to both parties. For instance, scholars emphasize not only the benefits of peace but also the trade that the treaty made possible. After all, sixty percent of the Song payments returned in the form of payments for goods imported by the Liao. It might be fair to say that that Professor Mote's turn to a more critical view of the Song's stance vis-a-vis the Liao might somehow reflect growing concern in the West (and especially the United States) about China's rising economic and military prominence. Although Professor Mote's stance is not as critical as Professor Fairbank's during the Cold War era, it might still mirror fears in America about China's power and intentions. In other words, the treaty a thousand years ago shows that China has historically accepted a status of relative equality with other nations only when forced by military realities to do so. Such pressures in this historic case were so severe that China was compelled to pay "tribute in reverse" or "indemnities" to a militarily stronger state. Such arguments would surely be of interest to military hawks and neo-cons in other nations.

One way to enhance our understanding of this historic treaty from a thousand years ago would be to relate it to a somewhat comparable problem today in Northeast Asia. On one side, North Korea faces in a predicament similar to the Liao in their inability to feed their own people and their need for resources from other states. Moreover, like the Liao, North Korea has insufficient military power to present a real danger to other states in the area. Like the Liao, the North Korean regime must depend on its military power to negoti-
cally richer states. Third, in the case of the Treaty of Shanyuan, both the Liao and the Song were wise enough to distinguish statements for domestic audiences from statements in the treaty and in ongoing diplomacy. For instance, Liao internal documents referred to Song payments as “tribute”; however, it wisely did not try to impose such language on the Song. Similarly, despite con-descending prefaces that Song officials wrote to historical accounts, the Song court enforced restraints on its language and the behavior of its envoys in dealings with the Liao. Similarly, all parties to the current negotiations over North Korea’s nuclear capacity would be wise to be sensitive to issues of “face” and national pride by all parties involved. Such matters of “face” require equality among nations. Successful negotiations thus requires some adjustment downward of the prevailing worldview in the empire of the era, at the same time, some flexibility is needed to provide some “face” to the leaders of the empire, too—especially in our modern era where leaders must “sell” their negotiated agreements to their own citizens. All parties should also realistically expect that domestic politics require government elites to portray their actions and concessions in ways that do not match the level of equality and mutual respect that is a prerequisite for any international agreement or treaty. Fourth, in the case of the Treaty of Shanyuan, one fact that made it work was that Song payments to the Liao largely returned to the Song to pay for food and other goods needed by the Liao. If the negotiators for the nations in the current crisis could find some way for the payments to North Korea to work to the economic benefit of the paying nations, too, the new relationship would be more stable because it would have a constituency among the elite within the nations making the concessions and payments. Even if these four points are judged irrelevant or unworkable, I hope this parallel to the present crisis on the Korean peninsula will help us understand the predicaments faced by the Song and the Liao a thousand years ago.

Glossary

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References


