

## **A Comparative Study on Designating the Crown Prince of Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty**

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**Abstract:** Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty; both gave up designating their sons as the crown prince. Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty relied on his mother to seize the inheritance rights. Under the pressure of the mother, he chose his younger brother as the heir. Although Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty continued the tradition of designating the younger brother as the crown prince in the early days, after the death of his brother, he chose the grandson of Emperor Taizu as the heir. This reflects that imperial clan struggle was a common phenomenon in the early days of the nomadic dynasty.

### **1. Introduction**

Yelu Deguang, Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Wanyan Sheng, Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty, were the second emperors of the Liao Dynasty and Jin Dynasty. Due to the different political situation in the early years of the two dynasties, there were differences of enthronement between Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty. Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty relied on the power of his mother to seize power, while Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty relied on Taizu's rule of designating the younger brother as the crown prince, but to a certain extent it also inspired the clan brothers to climb to the peak of power. In the process of designating the crown prince, the struggle relationship between the clan brothers was fully reflected. There have been relevant studies on the imperial succession system on the early days of the empire, but there is no comparison of designating the crown prince between the two generations. This paper intends to compare and discuss the designation conditions of Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty.

### **2. The Similarities and Differences of Enthronement between Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty**

In the first year of Tianxian period (926), the Emperor Taizu of Liao Dynasty died, and the Shulu family seized real power. The crown prince Yelu Bei “led the group of ministers and asked them to say to the queen: ‘The prince has merit and fame, and gets refined internally and externally. He is suitable for inheritance.’ Then the queen agreed. [1] “ However, Yelu Deguang became the emperor. Crown Prince Yelu Bei should had succeeded to the throne after Emperor Taizu's death [1], why did his younger brother get the throne? According to the historical records, “The Emperor Taizu died in Fuyu. The queen Shulu Ping liked Yelu Deguang, her second son, and wanted to make him the emperor. At the West Tower, she asked Yelu Deguang and Yelu Bei to stand in front of the tent on horses, and then she said to the chiefs: ‘I like my two sons very much. I don't know who should be the emperor. You help me choose the one and then take the reins of his horse.’ The chiefs knew what she was thinking, and they were all vying for the reins of Deguang's horse. They danced happily and said: ‘We are willing to serve the general Marshal as the emperor.’ The queen then said: ‘How dare I violate everyone's wishes.’ Therefore, Yelu Deguang became the emperor. [2]” Yelu Bei wasn't willing to hand over his throne. It was because Shulu Ping liked her second son, he had to act it out. In this struggle, Yelu Bei had no choice but to surrender because of his lack of power.

Yelu Deguang was the general marshal. He controlled the military power and supported by his mother, the queen, so he won the throne from his elder brother.

The enthronement of Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty basically did not cause major changes compared with Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty. In the first year of Shouguo (115), Emperor Taizu of Jin Dynasty “appointed his brother Wuqimai as his heir, a high-ranking official, and the marshal of the capital.[3]” Wanyan Sheng (Wuqimai), Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty, was appointed as the successor when Emperor Taizu was still on the throne. In the seventh year of Tianfu period (1123), Wanyan Aguda died, Emperor Taizong successfully inherited the throne [4].

The enthronement of both Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty ascension went smoothly. Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty was directly appointed as the heir by his elder brother. Although Yelu Deguang held the military power, the crown prince was Yelu Bei. Yelu Deguang relied on the support of his mother to force Yelu Bei to give away the throne. Although this incident did not lead to a direct royal conflict, it reflected the struggle between the faction led by Yelu Bei and the faction led by Taizong, which paved the way for future civil strife. The status of Shulu Ping was obvious in the event of supporting Yelu Deguang to be the emperor, so when Taizong still got overwhelming power, he had to obey what Shulu Ping said.

### **3. A Comparison between the Designation of the Crown Prince of Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty**

#### **3.1 Similarities and Differences of the Crown Prince Candidates**

Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty was enthroned in the second year of Tianxian period (927). In the fifth year of Tianxian (930), Emperor Taizong “named his younger brother Li Hu as Shouchang crown brother. [1]” Jin Taizong first made his younger brother the crown prince, and then changed it to the grandson of Emperor Taizu. In the first year of Tianhui period (1123), Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty rewarded his younger brother Wanyan Gao as a high-ranking official [4], and his heir as well. In the eighth year of Tianhui period (1130), after Wanyan Gao died, Taizong abandoned the tradition of inheriting among brothers and gave the title of crown prince to Wanyan Dan, the grandson of Emperor Taizu [3].

It can be seen from this that both Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty initially supported their younger brothers. But the younger brother of Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty Wanyan Gao died before Emperor Taizong. Therefore, Emperor Taizong appointed Emperor Taizu’s eldest grandson Wanyan Dan as the heir. Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty never appointed anyone else as the heir throughout his life.

#### **3.2 Similarities and Differences of the Reasons of Designating the Crown Prince**

In March of the fifth year of Tianxian period (930), Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty appointed his younger brother Li Hu as the crown brother. Yelu Jing was the eldest son of Emperor Taizong. He was born in August in the sixth year of Tianxian period (931) [1]. Yelu Jing the latest became the fetus in November of the fifth year of Tianxian period, only 8 months away from Li Hu being the crown brother. Why did Emperor Taizong appoint before the prince was born? Among the three sons of Emperor Taizu, Shulu Ping preferred the third son Li Hu the most to be the crown prince [1]. What's more, she also helped Emperor Taizong be on the throne. “State affairs are all determined by her. [2]” The actual power of Khitan was in the hands of Shulu Ping. Under the pressure of her, Emperor Taizong had to appoint his younger brother as the heir before his son was born.

It conformed to the tradition that Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty appointed his younger brother Wanyan Gao as the crown prince. However, after Wan Yan Gao's death, there were conflicts in the choice of the crown prince. Emperor Taizong gave up his younger brothers and chose Wan Yan Dan. This was related to the fact that Emperor Taizong was controlled by others in the early years because the imperial clan held great power. If Emperor Taizong followed the tradition, one of his brothers firstly got the chance to be the crown prince. Emperor Taizu of Jin Dynasty had two brothers. At that time, Wanyan Dan had died. Thus, Emperor Taizong had no brothers to appoint.

However, cousins whose fathers were brothers of Emperor Taizong's father also got chance. Among the cousins, Wanyan Zonghan was the most powerful. He was the general Marshal who held the military power. In the third year of Tianhui period (1125), Jin Dynasty invaded Song Dynasty from the east and west. The right deputy marshal Wanyan Zongwang was in charge of the east army while the left deputy marshal Wanyan Zonghan was in charge of the west. Wanyan Zonghan broke through Hedong and entered Bianjing with the greatest contribute. "At that time, Wanyan Zonghan was in charge of the affairs of the country. Although the secretary of country was in front of him, he was not courteous. Although Emperor Taizong was in charge of state affairs, Zong Han was very authoritarian and all decisions were made by him.[3]" Zhang Boquan believes that Zong Han's dictatorship is overstated. He quoted the imperial edict of Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty, "I entrusted these places to you today. If you want to relocate or grant to others, you must wait until after the approval, I'm afraid it will cause them to stay for a long time. You should act according to your own attention." He believes that Wanyan Zonghan was just a marshal, the other soldiers and horses are in the hands of Wanyan Zongwang and Wanyan Zongfu. Wanyan Zonghan cannot control them [6]. However, this edict was issued in the first year of Tianhui period (1123). Although Wanyan Zonghan made military exploits during the Taizu period, he wasn't more meritorious than the ministers. In the War with Song Dynasty, Wanyan Zonghan achieved great fame. According to historical records, Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty abused the treasury's tael, Wanyan Zonghan "questioned the emperor of violating the oath, so the officials took Taizong out of the palace, and Wanyan Zonghan rodded him by twenty. [7]" "Emperor Taizong was the king of the country, but was rodded by Wanyan Zonghan. It just reflects Wanyan Zonghan's prominent status. He didn't put the emperor in his eyes. He "also forced Zhang Bangchang to assume the throne by the order of the dependency lord. [3]" Although it looked like the order of the dependency lord, he was the chief plotter.

In the tenth year of Tianhui period (1132), There was a life-and-death contest between the clan around the issue of the crown prince. Since Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty no longer had any brothers as the heir, and the cousins belonged to collateral lines, the son of Taizong and the son of Taizu began to fight for the throne. Taizu has more than ten sons [8]. The eldest sons born by his concubine Wanyan Zonggan and Wanyan Zongfu, who had prominent status. Taizong had fourteen sons [4]. Among them, Wanyan Zongpan was the best. According to the historical record, "Wuqimai got sick, his son Wanyan Zongpan said he was his prime son, and he should become the crown prince. Then Wanyan Zonggan thought he was the eldest son of Emperor Taizu, and he should be the crown prince according to the rule. Wanyan Zonghan said that he was the eldest cousin with the credit, he should be the crown prince. It took many days for Wuqimai to make a decision.[7]" There were three people struggling for the throne, but Emperor Taizong eventually assigned Wanyan Dan as the crown prince. What is the reason?

These three competed for the throne, and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty was difficult to weigh. "Generals like Zonghan, Zongbi, and Wushi are all the founding heroes. It is difficult to control them, and Taizong can do nothing about it.[3]" Wanyan Xu put forward the opinion of assigning Emperor Taizu's eldest grandson Wanyan Dan [7]. Wanyan Zonghan knew he was so powerful, so it was bound to be difficult to be appointed as the heir. Although Wanyan Zonggan was the eldest son of Emperor Taizu, it did not conform to the tradition to be the heir. In order to prevent Emperor Taizong from assigning Wanyan Zongpan as the heir, and his power would not be weakened, when Wanyan Xu proposed to choose Wanyan Dan, Wanyan Zonghan and Wanyan Zonggan hit it off and forced Emperor Taizong to give up his son Wanyan Zongpan who born of the legal wife so that they could control the young emperor to strengthen their power [7]. The result is the compromise of the Nuzhen nobles. It not only conforms to the tradition, but also takes care of the interests of most aristocrats in Jin Dynasty [9]. In the end, the result of the dispute between the clan made Wanyan Dan become the crown prince. But this was not Emperor Taizong's original intention, but he followed it [6].

The decision made by Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty of appointing his brother Li Hu as the heir was suppressed by the queen. Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty followed the tradition and

appointed Wanyan Gao as the heir. He then was suppressed by his courtiers and appointed Wanyan Dan. The origin of the results is because the power is not entirely in their own hands. It is this imbalance of power that caused them to be at the mercy of the ministers or queens on the issue of the designation. It also triggered the clan behind them to fight for the throne.

### **3.3 Similarities and Differences of the Results of Designating the Crown Prince**

Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty died from illness on the way back from the Southern Expedition. Shizong Yelu Ruan made himself the emperor [1]. This is not just a mutiny. It is actually a continuation of the struggle between the faction of the prince and the faction of Shulu. Shizong was the son of Yelu Bei [1], representing the power of the faction of the prince. In the struggle with Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty, the faction of the prince failed but were not completely eliminated. Yelu Ruan stayed with Emperor Taizong and was awarded King of Yongkang due to his meritorious combat. After the death of Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty, Yelu Ruan succeeded to the throne [2]. “The Queen was put under house arrest at the side of Emperor Taizu's tomb. [2]” He regained the throne that should belong to his father. The struggle between Shizong of Liao Dynasty and the Shulu clan was actually a continuation of the struggle between the Yelu Bei family and the Shulu family after the death of Emperor Taizong. As a result of the struggle, the throne returned to the Yelu Bei family. The Shulu family's attempt of appointing Li Hu as the emperor through Taizong was in vain.

After Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty made Wanyan Dan the crown prince, the clan continued to fight for power. However, due to the efforts of Emperor Taizong and Xizong of Jin Dynasty, the crown prince wasn't been overturned. Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty adopted the strategy of apparently ascended but actually descended -- degradation instead of promotion. He assigned Wanyan Zonghan the marshal of the capital and deprived him of the power of the western army. Because at that time the capital marshal was no longer in charge of the military [9]. In the twelfth year of the Tianhui (1134), Liu Yu invited troops to attack Song Dynasty. Although the Wanyan Zonghan faction was very powerful, the actual military power was controlled by Wanyan Zongfu. Emperor Taizong ordered Wanyan Zongfu to assist Liu Yu as the left deputy Marshal [3]. Yuwen Maozhao said, “When the emperor collapsed, he ordered Wanyan Zongfu to lead the soldiers outside. Wanyan Zonghan had no arbitrary power. Thus, Wanyan Dan could be the crown prince. Otherwise, Wanyan Zonghan could control the military power and surely gain the position. If so, there must be lots worries.[3]” Wanyan Zonghan lost his military power. Although he had the intention to usurp the throne, he was unable to do that. He could only obey and helped Wanyan Dan be the emperor when Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty died.

After Wanyan Dan became the emperor, the three factions of Wanyan Zonghan, Wanyan Zonggan, and Wanyan Zongpan became antagonists. All these three factions were eager to be on the throne. Although Wanyan Dan gave them high positions and money, he deprived them of military power. Although Wanyan Zonghan lost his military power, but people in his faction such as Gao Qingyi and Xiao Qing still held power in the locality. At this time, Wanyan Dan transferred Gao Qingyi and Xiao Qing to the central government and strictly controlled them [8]. In the fifteenth year of Tianhui period (1137), he took the opportunity to kill Gao Qingyi [4], and his relatives [3]. Since then, the faction of Wanyan Zonghan had been basically eliminated, and Wanyan Zonghan died angrily [8]. In the third year of Tianjuan period (1140), Wanyan Dan killed Xiyin and Xiao Qing [4]. The Wanyan Zonghan faction was cut off.

Wanyan Zongpan had the greatest power after Wanyan Zonghan's death. “The emperor thought him sly and hard to control [3]”, “he assigned Wanyan Zongjuan as Taibao, deal with the matters of the three provinces, and control him by appointing him as the Yanguo emperor. [8]” However, the suppression of Wanyan Zonghan's faction caused panic, and the two colluded with each other in anticipation of rebellion. In the second year of Tianjuan (1139), “the emperor killed Songguo emperor Wanyan Zongpan, Yanguo emperor and Taibao who deal with matters of three provinces Wanyan Zongjuan, Teng emperor Wanyan Zongying, Yu emperor Wanyan Zongwei.[8]” So far, the Wanyan Zongpan faction has been cleared. Although Wanyan Zonggan was Qinguo emperor, in the

second year of Tianjuan period (1139), because of suppressing the rebellion of Wanyan Zongpan, he was named Liangsong emperor, but he also lost his military power and became the adoptive father of Wanyan Dan. At this point, the struggle between the three major old forces and the new force represented by Wanyan Dan ended with Wanyan Dan's complete victory.

#### 4. Conclusion

Both Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty were the second-generation emperors of the ancient ethnic minority regimes. They were pressured by the real power figures of the clan to make decisions on the emperor's decision on the issue of the designation of the crown prince. Even though they have differences in designating the crown prince (younger brother or brother's grandson), they both chose not to appoint their direct sons and grandsons. It reflects the fierce clan struggle and the weakness of imperial power in the early days of the founding of the country [10]. When Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty came to the throne, he experienced a battle in the clan. After he came to power, he was controlled by his mother and had to choose Li Hu as the heir. Although Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty went to the throne according to the system of designating younger brothers as the heir, he also appointed his brother as the heir. However, when Wanyan Gao died, Emperor Taizong was unable to control the situation of people in the clan seizing the power. Taking the interests of the clan into consideration, he also gave up the succession of father-die-son-inherit. This hides the competition of clan power.

This kind of clan struggle is long-term. Although Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty and Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty established heirs, it does not mean that the clan struggle disappeared. The Shulu clan of Liao Dynasty and the dependency emperors of Jin Dynasty are actually representatives of the conservative forces, while Shizong of Liao Dynasty who rose up in the military war and the Wanyan Dan who was influenced by the Sinicization of Jin Dynasty are actually representatives of the new forces. Shizong of Liao Dynasty was an officer next to Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty. He grasped military power and was the representative of the real power faction. They were not satisfied with the dictatorship of the Shulu clan and other conservative forces. Shizong, the son of Yelu Bei, had the ambition to regain his father's throne. Affected by Sinicization, Wanyan Dan advocated changing the traditional succession system to the throne, but Wanyan Zonghan and other dependency emperors believed that they had the right to inherit the throne, and it was inevitable that they would be incompatible with Wanyan Dan, and eventually led to a contest between uncles and nephews. From the designation of the crown prince, whether it was Emperor Taizong of Liao Dynasty or Emperor Taizong of Jin Dynasty, they all reflected the cruel clan struggle at the beginning of the nomadic dynasty.

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