

Comparison of Yuchi Jingde's Inscription, Epitaph and Biographies in the Tang Dynasty History Books

Yingying Xie^{1, a}

¹ School of Humanities and New Media, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, P.R of China

^a Email: 3411077616@qq.com

Abstract: Yuchi Jingde is an important founding general of the Tang Dynasty, and one of the twenty-four ministers of the Ling Yan Pavilion, whose biographies can be found in the two Tang Dynasty History Books, and whose inscriptions have been included in the "All Tang Dynasty Texts", together with the epitaphs found in the tomb of Yuchi Jingde, which can be mutually corroborated by the documents on the ground, and the combination of four kinds of historical materials can provide a clearer knowledge of Yuchi Jingde's marriage, his family, and his curriculum vitae.

Keywords: Tang Dynasty, Yuchi Jingde, Epitaph, Inscription, Biography.

1. Introduction

Yuchi Jingde was an important founding general of the Tang Dynasty, ranked seventh among the twenty-four ministers of merit in the Ling Yan Pavilion, and played a great role in the Xuanwu Gate Incident in particular. At the same time, its related historical records are also preserved relatively completely, not only in the books of the Tang dynasty history there is its biography, but its inscription on the monument is also included in the *All Tang Dynasty Texts*, and in 1971 in Baoji, Shanxi Province, the discovery of Yuchi Jingde's tomb mound, the excavation of its complete epitaph. The four original historical materials of Yuchi Jingde are well preserved, which is extremely rare among the important historical figures of the early Tang Dynasty. Therefore, by combining the four historical materials of his biography, epitaph, and inscriptions, we can better organize and understand the situation related to Yuchi Jingde.

2. Place of Ancestry

In the biography of Yuchi Jingde in the New Book of Tang and the Old Book of Tang, it is recorded that he is "a native of Shuo Zhou Shanyang", but in *The Tombstone of Yuchi Jun, Duke of Eguo, the Former Kaiser of the Great Tang Dynasty* (hereinafter referred to as the "Epitaph") it is recorded that he is "a native of Luoyang, Henan Province.", and in *The Stele of Yuchi Gong, Duke of Eguo, Governor of Bingzhou, Tang Dynasty* (hereinafter referred to as the "Inscription"), it is recorded that he is "a native of Luoyang, Henan Province". So, was Yuchi Jingde's place of origin Henan Luoyang or Shuo Zhou Shanyang? Or was it Shuo Zhou Shanyang?

First of all, the *Epitaph* and the *Inscription* were written orally by Yuchi Jingde's family members, so the records of his place of origin should be correct. However, according to the custom of writing epitaphs and inscriptions in the Tang Dynasty, the "Luoyang, Henan Province" should be his Junwang. Junwang is the place where the family name comes from and has the dual attributes of family and region. The Tang people attach importance to the Junwang, because the Junwang reflects its geographic origin and family name, and the geographic origin and family name represent its family lineage, so attaching importance to the Junwang is attaching

importance to the family lineage. As Mr. Mao Han Guang said: "A clan is a blood unit with a longitudinal degree of time, and its emphasis on the Junwang is different from other clans, as if an old store emphasizes its signboard, so the Junwang is always together with the clan." In Luoyang, the Mountain Mang unearthed a large number of tombstones that can also be seen to assess the character of the origin of the importance of the Junwang this practice, such as the Tang Dynasty Lu Chisong family, Cui Zhidao family, Wang De Biao family, they were born in Luoyang and buried in Luoyang, but in their epitaphs are recorded as Fanyang, Qinghe, Taiyuan, not Luoyang, such cases in the Tang epitaphs in the countless cases. Secondly, Zhengqiao's *Tongzhi* contained: "E Gong's former residence is in the Shijie village in south of Shuo Zhou city, the old site still exists", which suggests that Shuo Zhou should be Yuchi Jingde's former place of residence. To summarize, Henan Luoyang should be the Junwang of Yuchi Jingde, and Shuo Zhou Shanyang for his residence.

3. Family Background

There is no detailed record of Yuchi Jingde's family history in this biography of the two Tang history books, only a brief description of his family background: "Jingde started from a lowly position", but his *Epitaph* and *Inscription* recorded in detail the lineage of Yuchi Jingde's ancestor and his ancestor's career, to make up for the lack of the historical books. Through the *Epitaph* and *Inscription*, Yuchi Jingde's family lineage is not a "lowly" one.

First of all, in this biography of Yuchi Jingde self-assessment of his "lowly origin" is self-effacement and self-criticism. *The old book of Tang - Yuchi Jingde biography* recorded: "The Crown Prince and Prince Yuan Ji conspired to assassinate Emperor Taizong. They secretly wrote to Jingde, hoping for his support. Their letter read, "We hope you remember the good times we shared and the profound friendship between us. Please assist us." Along with the letter, they sent Jingde a cart full of gold and silver treasures. However, Jingde responded by emphasizing his humble beginnings..." This historical dates can be seen, this is in Prince Li Jiancheng and Li Yuanji's solicitation of Yuchi Jingde, Jingde's self-effacing evaluation, which is just to reject the enemy camp's solicitation and to belittle his own

"inferiority".

Secondly, the *Inscription* contains: "Jingde's great-grandfather, Ben Zhen, during the Later Wei dynasty, held the titles of Middle General and Champion General. He was also honored as the founding noble of Yuyang County. Later, he was granted military responsibilities across six provinces and posthumously conferred the title of 'Mao'. Jingde's grandfather, Yi Du, served as the Left Guard during the Northern Qi dynasty, later becoming a Senior Official with the Gold and Purple Seal. During the Zhou dynasty, he was entrusted with military duties in Jizhou and appointed as its governor. Jingde's father, Jia, was granted the title of Yitong Sanai in the Sui dynasty and worked within the royal court. The imperial dynasty posthumously honored him with the title 'Duke of Changning' and appointed him as the governor of Fen State and the military commander of You State." It is also recorded in the *Epitaph*: "Jingde's great-grandfather, Ben Zhen, served as the Western Middle General and Champion General during the Later Wei dynasty. He was honored with the title 'Duke of Yuyang'. Later, he was entrusted with military responsibilities across six provinces and appointed as the governor of Dian State. Jingde's grandfather, Yu Du, held positions as the Left Guard and a Senior Official with the Gold and Purple Seal during the Qi dynasty. He also served as the governor of Jizhou during the Zhou dynasty. Jingde's father, Jia, was conferred the title of Yitong in the Sui dynasty. The imperial court later awarded him the governorship of Fen State, the military command of You State, as well as military duties in six states: You, Gui, Gui, Yi, Ping, and Yan. He was also appointed as the governor of You State and was honored with the title 'Duke of Changning'. Sadly, he passed away at a relatively young age." A combination of these two historical data can be seen in Yuchi Jingde family generations for the government, from the great-grandfather when the family was very prominent, although his father Yu Chijia died in middle age, also in the Sui dynasty as an official position, was awarded the "Yitong Sansi". In the Sui Dynasty, "Yitong Sansi" was the title of a civil official, with the rank of the fifth grade, which shows that Yuchi Jingde was not of "lowly origin", but from a distinguished family.

Finally, in conjunction with the family history of Yuchi Jingde's wife, his wife Su also came from a family of officials. In his wife's epitaph, the *Epitaph for Mrs. Su, wife of Duke Eguo of Shangzhuguo, Governor of Bingzhou, Situ of the Great Tang Dynasty*, recorded: "Her great-grandfather, Yi, held esteemed positions during the Later Wei dynasty as the 'Jinzi Guanglu Dafu' and the 'Tai Fuqing'. He was also conferred the military command of Jizhou and served as its governor... Her grandfather, Yuanji, during the Qi dynasty, served as the 'Mishu Cheng' and as the military chief of Daizhou... His father, Qian, served in the Qi dynasty in the ceremonial role of 'Jijiu' for the Prince of Nan'an. Later, during the Sui dynasty, he was appointed as the military chief of Tanzhou." This can be seen in Yuchi Jingde's wife Su's family is also very prominent, from the Wei to the Northern Qi and then to the Sui dynasty her family has been in high officialdom for generations. According to the concept of marriage at that time, Yuchi Jingde can be married to Su, then it shows that they should be equivalent to the family. The two families all should be the official family, Jingde should not be the blacksmith in the folk rumors.

4. Career

The Epitaph reads, "(Yuchi Jingde) died on November 26th, the 3rd year of the Xianqing reign, at the home of Longli Zhengli in the 70th year of his age." From this, we can see that Jingde had been through four emperors in two dynasties from the fifth year of the Kaihuang reign of the Sui Dynasty to the third year of the Xianqing reign of Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty, which can be regarded as a rich experience. Combining the biographies in the two Tang history books, the *Epitaph* and the *Inscription*, we can roughly divide Yuchi Jingde's life into five stages.

The first stage is the period of early childhood, that is, from the fifth year of Kaihuang to the end of Daye, before Yuchi Jingde joined the army in Goyang. This stage of his historical record is very little, only the *Epitaph* contains: "At the young age of thirteen, he already showcased remarkable leadership qualities. During a recreational trip to the outskirts, he clandestinely began to muster troops and train them in secret. He erected temporary tents from straw, replicating authentic military formations. Should anyone disrupt the formation due to the wind, they would be met with severe punishment..." This can be seen that Yuchi Jingde when he was a child already knew the way of the art of war.

The second stage is to start from the army, that is, at the end of Daye, served in the army in Goyang until the third year of the Wude era. In this stage, his biographies in the two Tang history books are recorded briefly, *The old book of Tang* recorded: "At the end of the Daye, Jinde entered the army in gao yang. Jingde was so brave in catching thieves that he was awarded the title of "Chao San Dafu." The New Book of the Tang Dynasty recorded: "The end of Daye, joined the army in Gao Yang, Jingde was awarded the title of Chao San Dafu for his accumulated military service." But the *Epitaph* has a detailed record of this period, Yuchi Jingde was first awarded the title of Chao San Dafu in the Sui Dynasty by crusading against the rebels Zhai Songbai and Liu Baoqiang and winning the victory over many with few, and then he was awarded the title of Zheng Yi Dafu after successfully suppressing the rebellions of Wang Shubai and Li Shan Fei. At the end of the Sui Dynasty, Liu Wuzhou took him as a general during the peasant revolt. At this stage, although Yuchi Jingde made a lot of military achievements, he was not utilized, and the important turning point of his life was that he was put under the command of Prince Li Shimin, in the third year of the Wude era.

The third stage is Yuchi Jingde political activity is the highest, the most reused period, that is, from the third year of Wude to the third year of Zhenguan. *The Old Book of the Tang Dynasty* recorded: "In the third year of the Wude era, as Emperor Taizong laid siege to Baibi of Wuzhou, Wuzhou commanded Jingde and Song Jingang to resist the emperor's forces. However, in the end, Jingde chose to surrender with the city." Yuchi Jingde since the third year of Wude has been followed by Prince Li Shimin. He participated in the unification wars of the early Tang Dynasty and pacified Wang Shichong, Dou Jiande, Liu Heita, and Xu Yuanlang. In the ninth year of the Wude, Jingde was involved in the Xuanwu Gate Incident, to which he contributed the most. From helping Emperor Taizong plan and liaise with people before the incident, to shooting Li Yuanji in Xuanwu Gate during the incident, and then asking for the appointment of Emperor Gaozu for Prince Li Shimin after the incident, the whole incident was filled with the figure of Yuchi Jingde's

participation. However, in the two Tang Dynasty history books, there are different evaluations of the Xuanwu Gate Incident when it comes to rewarding all the people for their achievements. *The Old Book of Tang - Yuchi Jingde biography* recorded: "When discussing the merits, Jingde and Zhangsun Wuji were the first and were rewarded with ten thousand silks and cloths." *The New Book of Tang - Yuchi Jingde biography* recorded: "He was awarded the first place for his merits and was given 10,000 ponies." These differences involve a comparison of the roles played by both Zhangsun Wuji and Yuchi Jingde in the Xuanwu Gate Incident. Regarding this question, Mr. Lu Simian in the *"Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties History"* commented on the Xuanwu Gate Incident has already made an answer: "To this campaign, the planner to Zhangsun Wuji's work is the greatest, and the Fang, Du second; martial arts generals should be Yuchi Jingde's work is the greatest; therefore, on the merits, Wuji, Jingde each for the first also." After the Xuanwu Gate Incident, Yuchi Jingde went to the highest political peak and was granted the title of General of the Right Martial Arts and bestowed the title of Duke of Wu. When the Turk attacked in the first year of Zhenguan, Jingde was reused again and was appointed as the military governor of Jingzhou Road, leading the army to defend against the Turk. Since then, Yuchi Jingde has been following Prince Li Shimin's side, after the Xuanwu Gate Incident, the Prince Li Shimin took the throne, Yuchi Jingde has been active in the center of civil service to the most brilliant stage.

The fourth stage is the period of local service, that is, from the third year of Zhenguan to the nineteenth year of Zhenguan. *The old book of tang - Yuchi Jingde biography* recorded: "In the third year of the Zhenguan era, he was appointed as the military commander of Xiangzhou ...By the eighth year, he was promoted to the governorship of Tongzhou. Recognized for his outstanding contributions ...By the eleventh year, he was conferred the role of governor for Xuanzhou. Subsequently, he served as the military commander for both Fuzhou and Xiazhou ... In the seventeenth year, he formally requested retirement from the court. In acknowledgment of his services, he was bestowed the title of 'Kaifu Yitong Sansi', and granted the privilege to attend the emperor's court on the first and fifteenth of each month." Combined with the *Epitaph* in the addition: "In the 16th year of Zhenguan, Jingde was awarded the title of governor of Xiazhou, military officer of the three states of Xia, Sui, Yin, and Cishi of Xiazhou." It can be seen that from the third year of Zhenguan to the 17th year of Zhenguan, Yuchi Jingde has been in the local governors or Cishi, so it can be said that the entire second half of his career is in various local offices, and has not been reused in the central government. For this phenomenon, *the old book of Tang - Yuchi Jingde biography* has also made an explanation: "Jingde was an outspoken individual. Owing to his outstanding contributions, he frequently criticized the misconduct of other high-ranking officials, such as Wuji, Xuanling, and Ruhui, leading to strained relations with some of the court's elites." It is believed that Jingde's straightforward character, often exposing or attacking other people's faults and shortcomings, and being conceited of his achievements, which led to his poor relations with the ministers in the court, caused him to leave the central government to serve as a local official. Although only this

explanation is too thin, but in its four first-hand historical materials have not seen detailed records, which the most fundamental reasons have to be later in-depth investigation.

The fifth stage is the stage of his retirement in his later years, that is, from the 19th year of Zhenguan to the 3rd year of Xianqing. There are no detailed records of Yuchi Jingde's later life in his *Epitaph* and *Inscription*, but *the Old Book of Tang - Yuchi Jingde biography* is contained: "In his later years, Jingde became deeply superstitious, with a particular fascination for alchemy. He often consumed peculiar elixirs and commissioned the construction of numerous exquisite structures. He frequently indulged in music sessions, throwing banquets for his own pleasure. His interactions with the outside world dwindled, and he led this reclusive life for sixteen years." It can be seen that Yuchi Jingde had been obsessed with Taoist alchemy spells since his retirement in the 17th year of Zhenguan, beginning at the age of 58 and ending with his death at the age of 74, during which time he had little interaction with outsiders. Jingde's later life is a true reflection of "the flourishing of Taoism at that time, and at the same time it can be seen that in his later years Jingde withdrew from the center of power in order to protect himself by practicing Taoism."

5. Conclusions

Yuchi Jingde was an important general in the early years of the Tang Dynasty, from the end of the Sui peasant revolt to the beginning of the Tang Dynasty, the rebellion against the eighteen anti-Kings, to the Xuanwu Gate mutiny embraced the King of Qin succeeded to the throne, the first half of his life to follow the Li Shimin to fight, the second half of his life to serve as a local official around the world. It can be said that his presence in the early Tang Dynasty has made a huge impact, through his life we can more clearly understand all kinds of situations at the end of the Sui dynasty and the Tang Dynasty.

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