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# *Imaginations and Reimaginings of National Origin*

*—A Case Study of the Two Times that the Gaxian Cave was Discovered*

Luo Xin\*

**Abstract:** Hailed as one of the most significant breakthroughs in the studies of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe since modern times, the discovery of the Gaxian Cave has advanced our understanding of Xianbei Tribal history. The discovery has created a sensation and had such an impact because of the accurate and reliable historical authenticity it contains. Notably, the elegiac address inscribed on the cave walls during the Northern Wei Dynasty serves as the best evidence for the authenticity.<sup>①</sup> If the historical record that Emperor Taiwu of the Northern Wei Dynasty ordered courtiers to pay respects to the “ancestral stone cave of the Xianbei Tribe” can be regarded as the first discovery of the Gaxian Cave, the fact that an archaeological team led by Mi Wenping found the inscription on the cave walls during a field trip in 1980 should mark the rediscovery of the Gaxian Cave. Because the origin and migrations of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe were the focus of previous studies on the discovery of Gaxian Cave, the origin history studies that has become an inevitable part of nation history studies has showed a colorful and interesting trajectory of highs and lows in the case of Gaxian Cave, and highlighted the inherent characteristics and dilemmas of national history discipline in theoretical methods in a general sense.

**Keywords:** national origin; Gaxian Cave; polity

National history is normally treated as an inter-discipline of ethnology and history. The reason why national history was established as a discipline lies in the combination of history studies and the national (or ethnic) concept and ethnology of the modern Western world. Although the concepts of some basic disciplines have incurred strong criticism, national history has made quite some

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① Mi, 1981, pp. 1–7.

headway as a sub-discipline. As for the author, there is no difference between national history, regional history, dynastic history or specialized history, for they all service the understanding and presenting of general history. Unlike many emerging specialized histories, it is difficult to characterize national history with a signature methodology. Using national labels to classify people and peoples and studying their respective and common histories is its most distinctive feature. Such a disciplinary feature not only makes it difficult to situate this discipline clearly in the modern academic framework, but also requires this discipline to face some inherent pitfalls in the sense of methodology. These pitfalls are exactly what this paper will discuss, because the author considers the Gaxian Cave to be a prime example of the topic. By analyzing this case and discussing the theories of national history, I aim to articulate and underscore the ubiquity of the methodological pitfalls in national origin history studies.

## 1. Discourses on national process and national history

In his famous paper defining a nomadic tribe in the Eurasian Steppe during the Middle Ages, Rudi P. Lindner pointed out that when historians conduct analysis based on investigation data collected by modern ethnology and theories derived from contemporary anthropology, they should pay attention to the adherence of ethnological investigations to focusing on blood families and other dimensions of a nomadic tribe. This is because the political nature, which was yet the defining nature of a nomadic tribe in history, has long been greatly weakened under the control of modern countries.<sup>①</sup> The author has studied the political titulary of Inner Asian nomads during the middle ancient times, building on an important theoretical prerequisite that the nation is first and foremost a polity and political nature is its essential feature. The author ever said, “All the so-called nations that appeared in the historical arena are all polities and social structures bound by political relations and powers, albeit these kinds of structures always dress themselves up as social communities rooted in blood relations and bound by close biological connections.” Based on this premise, the author stresses that “Northern nations that are situated in the context of historical studies are polities, rather than ‘ethnic groupings’ and are distinct from each other in ‘race’”<sup>②</sup> in the normal sense.

From the viewpoint of the author, “nation” is a process during which identity is built towards a polity driven by political powers, organizations and interests. Of course, this definition is different from how modern ethnology perceives nation. Stereotyping nations as everlasting and natural groupings from a traditional perspective is, to quote Jacques Derrida, “metaphysics of presence,”<sup>③</sup> or “logocentrism.”<sup>④</sup> For nation, we should perceive and discourse upon it from a more fluid and decentralized perspective by drawing on Derrida's ideas. In the words of Derrida, nation is merely “a function” in which “an infinite number of sign-substitutions” come into play.<sup>⑤</sup> To conclude, national process is a meaning game with sign-substitutions as players.

Over the past thirty years, the most influential scholars and publications on nations and nationalism

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① Lindner, 1982, pp. 689–711.

② Luo, 2009, pp. 2–3.

③ Derrida, 1978, p. 281.

④ Derrida, 1974, p. 12.

⑤ Derrida, 1978, p. 280.

all have underscored that “nation” is a modern concept. However, all kinds of nationalist movements have historically contextualized this modern concept since modern times, which has had a profound influence on history studies in discoursing upon histories of ancient nations or ethnic groupings. Just as Audrey Smedley summarized, ethnic identity occurred before the dawn of modern history which was by its very nature “fluid and malleable,”<sup>①</sup> which is similar to that since modern times. Fluidity and malleability are exactly what Derrida means by saying that the nation process is a meaning game with sign-substitutions as players. But it is the political nature constructed by a nation or an ethnic grouping that causes the fluidity and malleability. Ernest Gellner said, “Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”<sup>②</sup> According to Benedict Anderson, nation is a polity that is made through political power and a political belief that attempts to persuade people into believing it by any and every means. He said, “I define the nation as: an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>③</sup> Wang Mingke pointed out, “Ethnic groupings are developed and restructured through driving structural amnesia and enhancing new collective memories.”<sup>④</sup> With this idea in mind, ethnic grouping is not the basis and premise of collective memories. On the contrary, it is based on the chosen and constructed historical memories that the so-called nations, ethnic groupings and societies came into being. Therefore, Benedict Anderson simply said, “In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages with face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.”<sup>⑤</sup>

With the theory in mind, we should be particularly careful in dealing with ancient historical materials on national history and reuse them in a critical, selective and deliberate manner. Historically, writing national history was an important part in building the sense of national belonging (namely ethnic identity). Just as Wang Mingke said, “People use ‘past’ to interpret modern intergroup relationships, ... (national history) is often leveraged as a tool to interpret the histories of oneself and others to rationalize and consolidate the interests of groups in the real world.”<sup>⑥</sup> But, nearly every nation-constructing process has served as evidence that a nation is always constructed on common ancestry, common lineage, common genealogy and common biological connections. In particular, common lineage means not only that the sense of belonging is natural and non-optional, but also that the nationhood is not constructed on interest-based relationships. In this way, the true nature of nation is successfully concealed. As Anderson said, “The whole point of the nation is that it is interestless. Just for that reason, it can ask for sacrifices.”<sup>⑦</sup> Constructing such a nation requires by definition that every nation has its own origin history in which the nation can be descended from a certain ancestor. Hence, when dealing with such historical materials on national origin, we should not at first posit that the historical materials are real, but should think, just like Wang Mingke holds, “Ancient historical records and cultural relics should be treated as a collective memory heritage of human groupings that are created and preserved under the force of a subjective ‘intention’ of some individual or society.”<sup>⑧</sup>

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① Smedley, 1998, pp. 690–702.

② Gellner, 1983, p. 1.

③ Anderson, 2005, p. 6.

④ Wang, 2006, p. 23.

⑤ Anderson, p. 6.

⑥ Wang, pp. 30–31.

⑦ Anderson, p. 139.

⑧ Wang, p. 33.

Different from the self-reflection and awareness of self<sup>①</sup> specific to cognitive psychology in the general sense, ethnic identity is a kind of reflection and awareness of individuals and groups towards their ethnic groupings. And this kind of reflection and awareness is just the premise for the existence of a nation or an ethnic grouping, rather than the reverse — the sense of national belonging is the premise of the existence of a nation — as fundamentalists believe. That is to say, nations or ethnic groups are made, not born.<sup>②</sup> Ernest Gellner said, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.”<sup>③</sup> Norma Diamond and Ralph Litzinger have respectively situated the history of the Miao (an ethnic grouping in South China)<sup>④</sup> and the history of the Yao (an ethnic grouping in Southwest and South China)<sup>⑤</sup> in an ideological background to analyze and deconstruct them.

For modern researchers, origins and migrations are the two most prominent pitfalls encountered when dealing with traditional historical materials related to national history.

Tracing the origin of a large ethnic grouping back to the origin of its ruling clan or family is on the premise of accepting or believing in the unfailing dominance of this ruling clan or family. In this way, the historical origin of an individual clan or family is used to illustrate, even replace the historical origin of its ethnic grouping that is otherwise rich and involves complex components. This is the basic feature of national origin studies. Although most of the researchers do not oversimplify the history of an ethnic grouping to that of its ruling clan or family, they have neglected or concealed — either intentionally or unintentionally — the historical traditions of other clans or families when tracing the historical origin of the ruling clan or family due to the constraints in the theoretical logic of origin studies. As a result, history studies on an ethnic grouping are left centered on the rulership. Without frequent, serious criticism and reflection on the formation process of traditional historical materials, it would be hard for researchers to resist the force of inertial thinking set by “creators” of relevant historical materials, entering the pre-excavated historical tunnel.

Given their belief in the existence of traceable “national origins”, researchers must often conduct “migration studies”; or on the contrary, researchers on national migrations often must start from national origin studies.<sup>⑥</sup> In particular, migration here does not refer to the cyclical movement of nomads within a limited space in order to conduct economic production activities, but the mass movement organized and implemented by ancient populations, including nomads, for a certain clear purpose within a space much larger than their economic production scope after developing into certain-sized political units.<sup>⑦</sup> Most national origin legends include stories of national migrations and historians have a spontaneous tendency to explain why a certain ethnic grouping appeared in a specific time and space from the perspective of national migrations.<sup>⑧</sup> When

① Leary & Tangney, 2003, p. 3.

② Schiller, 1977, pp. 23–35.

③ Gellner, 1965, p. 169.

④ Diamond, 1995, pp. 92–116.

⑤ Litzinger, pp. 117–139.

⑥ Fialkoff, 2000, pp. 181–187.

⑦ Climate change is most frequently mentioned as to why mass migration happened in history. Please refer to William B. Meyer. Climate and migration. In Andrew Bell–Fialkoff (Ed.), *The role of migration in the history of the Eurasian Steppe*, pp. 287–294.

⑧ There are many cases in which researchers voluntarily use migration to interpret historical phenomena, for instance — a case with which Inner Asia historians are most familiar — Joseph de Guignes, a French historian of the eighteenth century, posited a connection between Huns and Xiongnu ( Joseph de Guignes, *Histoire générale des Huns, des Mongoles, des Turcs et des Tartares occidentaux*, Paris: 1756–1758). However, according to Denis Sinor, there exists an unbridgeable chronological fracture between the huns led by Attila and the Hun empire in Mongolian Plateau, so it's impossible to get Joseph de Guignes's posit confirmed. Please refer to Denis Sinor's *The Historical Attila*. The quotation comes from F. H. Bäuml and M. D. Bimbaum ed, *Attila, the Man and His Image*, Budapest: Corvina Books, 1993, p. 5. The Historical Attila, translated by Luo Xin, proofread by Bi Bo and collected in Denis Sinor's *Studies in Medieval Inner Asia (Collected Studies)* translated by the Nation History Teaching and Research Room of the Department of History of Peking University, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2006, pp.29–30.

discussing the barbarians in the middle ancient times, the author has stressed that migration theories tend to use national migrations to explain the current ethnic grouping patterns and see the current ethnic grouping systems as a result of the movements of some certain alien ethnic grouping that happened more recently.

<sup>①</sup> Wang Mingke pointed out that, “People use the fictional social memories derived from the ‘migration in history’ to declare the ‘origins’ of their own nation or other nations to define the nature of their own or other ethnic groupings.” <sup>②</sup> Like origin studies, migration studies tend to use the supposed “migration” (even if the migration really happened) of the rulership to conceal and replace the otherwise rich and diverse traditions and history of the entire ethnic grouping.

Judging from the composition of China’s traditional historical materials, historical materials on the origins and migrations of all nations have always had a prominent position. Be it when historians used the Huaxia-Han national recorded histories of alien nations or dynasties established by non-Huaxia-Han nations (namely so-called “Dynasties of Infiltration” or “Dynasties of Conquest”) to sort out their national histories, records about national origins and migrations have always been discoursed upon in an articulate and unquestionable manner, for instance, *Treatise on the Xiongnu (Xiong Nu Lie Zhuan)* in *Sima Qian’s Records of the Grand Historian (Shi Ji)* for the Huaxia-Han national recorded histories of alien nations, and *the Book of Wei: Preface to Annals (Wei Shu Xu Ji)* based on epics of the Tuoba Clan and previous official histories, and *Annals 1: Ancestral Records of History of Jin (Jin Shi Shi Ji)*, based on three volumes of *Memoir on Erstwhile Dynasties (Xian Chao Shi Lu)* compiled by Wanyan Xu, et. al. for the non-Huaxia-Han nations. For Russian and Soviet national studies, Этногенез (Ethnogenesis) is an important term which stresses focus on the origin and evolution of a nation in a specific time and space from the perspective of historical traceability. <sup>③</sup>

Benedict Anderson employed “imagined communities” to describe ethnic grouping entities and their cultural natures. To imagine is of course not to make but is driven by realistic needs. Diversification of realistic interests decides diversification of imagination. From the perspective of historical studies, history is a key means via which imaginations of communities are legalized, so the right to discourse upon history is a political right. Meanwhile, discourses on history are supposed to serve the current political interests, and if not, they would not be the focus, disappearing forever or taking a back seat to bide their time. As history is discoursed upon again and again, original imaginations are confronted with different fates — to be inherited, to be enhanced, to be abandoned, or to be transformed. Most often, discourses that used to be the centerpiece and the mainstream are marginalized, and those that used to be suppressed are pushed back to the forefront. In this sense, history is a discipline through which we can accept or discard different kinds of historical imaginations, so by definition, it is to reimagine. Every reimagination is to sort out and assess various previous imaginations. Although the involvement of the interest patterns of the times cannot be avoided, in fact every reimagination of history must build on historical materials that are merely erstwhile imaginations even if norms, and technical standards for historical discipline are strictly observed.

Pitfalls in historical materials and methods have decided a train of misunderstandings arising from national

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<sup>①</sup> Luo, 2009, pp. 4–20.

<sup>②</sup> Wang, p. 42.

<sup>③</sup> To request a systematic study on theories, methods and practices of ethnogenesis by Soviet scholars, please refer to the English Version of Лев Гумилев’s Этногенез и Биофераземли — Leo Gumilëv, *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere*, Moscow: Pro-gress Publishers, 1990, pp. 203–242.

history discourses. It is these misunderstandings — imaginations stemming from imaginations — that have constructed national histories that are based on realities and firmly believed by those who recorded them. The mission of modern historians is perhaps not to remove imagined realities from previous imaginations, but to analyze and institute the process of determining how these imaginations were identified as historical realities.

Next, this paper will present a case study of the two discoveries of the Gaxian Cave by focusing on their relationships with the imaginations and reimaginings of the origin history of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe.

## 2. The two times that the Gaxian Cave was discovered

The Gaxian Cave is perched atop a hillside granite cliff on Gashan Mountain bordering the north bank of the Gan River in the north part of the Greater Khingan Range, Oroqen Banner of the Hulunbuir League, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. About 90 meters long from south to north, about 27 meters wide from east to west and about 20 meters high, this stone cave is currently considered to be the birthplace of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe of the Northern Wei Dynasty. And it is the two discoveries of this cave that have helped establish this understanding.

According to the *Preface to Annals of the Book of Wei*, the Tuoba Clan was descended from the Xianbei, a tribe born in the “Great Xianbei Mountain,” and experienced two southward migrations to “Daze (present-day Lake Baikal),” then further “southward” to the “old haunt of Xiongnu.”<sup>①</sup> The preface provides a detailed introduction to the lineage of the Tuoba Clan from Shi Jun, an early chieftain of the Xianbei Tribe who was a contemporary of Emperor Yao and Emperor Shun, then directly to Shi Jun’s sixty-seventh-generation grandson (Emperor Cheng Tuoba Mao) under whose rule the Tuoba Clan “governed thirty-six tribes with ninety-nine aristocratic families,” and then to Tuoba Mao’s fourteenth-generation grandson Tuoba Liwei whose temple name was Shizu.<sup>②</sup> Although the origin and migration discourses in the preface have certainly left some doubts, most scholars have acknowledged that the *Preface to Annals* is based on the historical memories of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe.<sup>③</sup>

Among the historical literature regarding the Northern Dynasties, the most important evidence illustrating the origin of the Tuoba Clan is the discovery of the “ancestral stone cave of the Xianbei Tribe” during the Northern Wei Dynasty. According to the *Biography of Wuluohou (Wu Luo Hou Zhuan), the Book of Wei*, “In the fourth year (443) of the Taipingzhenjun reign of Emperor Taiwu, the Wuluohou Kingdom sent an envoy to the court of the Northern Wei Dynasty, reporting that the ancestral stone cave of Xianbei Tribe was located to the northwest of its territory. Ninety steps (step is a traditional Chinese unit of length defined as about 1.3 meters, varying in different dynasties) long from south to north, forty steps wide from east to west and seventy Chi (a traditional Chinese unit of length that is defined as 1/3 of a meter) high, the cave was believed to be a mansion

① Volume 1: *Preface to Annals, Book of Wei (Punctuation Edition)*, 1974, pp. 1–2.

② Volume 1: *Preface to Annals, Book of Wei (Punctuation Edition)*, pp. 1–3.

③ Uchida Ginpu, *A textual research of Preface to Annals of Book of Wei and its lineage — A reaction of Shida Fudomaro’s criticism on the lineage of King of the Kingdom of Dai*, Issue 3, Volume 22 (1937). Later, it was retitled *A textual research of Preface to Annals of Book of Wei and its lineage — Evidence of the establishment process of Tuoba regime*, and included in his *A study on North Asia history — About Xianbei, Rouran and Turkic peoples*, Kyoto: Doho-sha Printing, 1975, pp. 95–118.

of some immortals and thus attracted countless visitors.” Hence, “Emperor Taiwu sent Li Chang, the then Vice Director of the Secretariat, to the cave to pay respects and inscribe an elegiac address on the walls.”<sup>①</sup> Additionally, *Treatise 4: Rituals 1 (Li Zhi), the Book of Wei*, also gave a detailed account, “Xianbei ancestors of the Northern Wei Dynasty lived around Youdu County and carved an ancestral temple out of stones in the northwest of the Wuluohou Kingdom. Later, as the Xianbei tribe continued migrating southward, their settlements were farther and farther away from the temple. In the middle Taipingzhenjun reign of Emperor Taiwu, the Wuluohou Kingdom sent an envoy to offer tributes and report to Emperor Taiwu that the ancestral stone temple of the Xianbei Tribe was in their kingdom. Despite the passage of time, the temple had remained intact and drawn many supplicants who believed that some immortals lived there and would grant their wishes. Therefore, in the same year, Emperor Taiwu sent Li Chang, the then Vice Director of the Secretariat, to the cave to conduct the act of ancestral worship in the name of the royal paternal and maternal ancestors.”<sup>②</sup> This is the first discovery of the Gaxian Cave.

According to the *Biography of Wuluohou, the Book of Wei*, Emperor Taiwu did not know of the “ancestral temple” or of the “ancestral stone cave of the Xianbei Tribe” until he was told by the envoy from the Wuluohou Kingdom. *Treatise 4: Rituals 1, the Book of Wei*, however, directly recorded that Xianbei ancestors of the Northern Wei Dynasty “carved an ancestral temple out of stone in the northwest of the Wuluohou Kingdom,” but later the ties with the temple were cut due to the Tuoba Clan’s southward migrations. In this way, the “ancestral stone cave” of the Tuoba Clan is upgraded from a report of the Wuluohou Kingdom to a discourse on history. As to the historical records about the cave in *Treatise 4: Rituals 1*, the elegiac address inscribed by Li Chang, the then Vice Director of the Secretariat, under the order of Emperor Taiwu is most important:

His Majesty Emperor Taiwu with sincere respects orders me, Li Chang, to head a procession to conduct the act of ancestral worship with premium horses and oxen as sacrifices. Since the Tuoba Clan was born, the temple on the land of a small alien tribe has blessed generation upon generation of our Tuoba people. After all these years, our great Tuoba Clan decided to migrate southward about an aeon later. Without the blessings of our ancestors, our great Tuoba Clan would not have founded our Northern Wei Dynasty based in the Central Plain. Without the blessings of our ancestors, our Northern Wei Dynasty would not have conquered and annihilated atrocious enemies to pacify the four quarters. Without the blessings of our ancestors, I, the sovereign, would not have ascended the throne to establish a reputation. Without the blessings of our ancestors, the distant tribe would not have sent an envoy to report the existence of our ancestral temple. Everyone knows that whoever attempts to damage the old temple would be punished to death. Large numbers of our people would like to pray for blessings from our ancestors. Without the exploits of our ancestors, our Northern Wei Dynasty would not have developed from strength to strength. Without the blessings of our ancestors, our great Tuoba Clan would not have blossomed into such a large family. Please allow me to have the honor to conduct the act of ancestral worship. Wish our Tuoba Clan a large, happy and prosperous clan forever.<sup>③</sup>

As explicitly shown in this elegiac address, the “old temple” is the “birthplace” of the Tuoba Clan, and judging from the words, “After all these years, our great Tuoba Clan decided to migrate southward about an

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① Volume 100: *Biography of Wuluohou, Book of Wei*, p. 2224.

② Volume 108a *Treatise 4: Rituals 1, Book of Wei*, p. 2738.

③ Volume 108a *Treatise 4: Rituals 1, Book of Wei*, p. 2738.



aeon later,” the Tuoba Clan indeed has a migration history, which tallies with the records in the *Preface to Annals of the Book of Wei*. Therefore, this first discovery of the Gaxian Cave has provided plenty of evidence that is ironclad enough to convince researchers of later generations of the origin history of the Tuoba Clan. But they still disagree with each other, mainly on where the “Wuluohou Kingdom” was located. *Encyclopaedia of the Four Barbarians (Si Yi Kao)* in the *Encyclopaedia of Official Documents of the Qing Dynasty (Qing Wen Xian Tong Kao)* used “Wuluosi” instead of “Wuluohou” and interpreted it as “Russia.”<sup>①</sup> Hence, He Qiutao concluded from this that the ancestral stone cave of the Northern Wei Dynasty “should be located to the due west of Nerchinsk City” in his *Detailed Account of a Trip to the North China (Shuo Fang Bei Cheng)*.<sup>②</sup> Of course, this kind of error can be solved by methods of traditional philology. Ding Qian wrote in his *A Textual Research into Geographical Locations of All External Peoples in the Book of Wei (Wei Shu Ge Wai Guo Zhuan Di Li Kao Zheng)*, “The Wuluohou Kingdom is for a certainty located within our territory, so it is such a stupid false that textologists of former generations replace 侯 (hou) with 俟 (si).”<sup>③</sup> Based on the *Biography of Shiwei (Shi Wei Zhuan)* and the *Biography of Wuluo Hun (Wu Luo Hun Zhuan)* in Volume 199 of the *Old Book of Tang (Jiu Tang Shu)*, Shiratori Kurakichi determined that the Wuluohou Kingdom should be located along the Nenjiang River and the Tuoba Clan's ancestral stone cave should sit nearby the Khingan Range. He further declared that this area was the original settlement of the Tuoba Clan.<sup>④</sup>

The first discovery of the Gaxian Cave seems to have given much reliability to the *Preface to Annals of the Book of Wei*. For modern researchers, there seem to be only two questions to be answered: First, where on earth was the Tuoba Clan's birthplace (the supposed “Great Xianbei Mountain”) located? Second, via which route did the Tuoba Clan migrate southward to the “old haunt of Xiongnu?”

As to the first question, there has been a general consensus among both ancient and modern scholars that the Great Xianbei Mountain roughly refers to the Greater Khingan Range. Then, via which route did the Tuoba Clan migrate southward? Because of a lack of historical materials, it seems difficult for historians to go deeper. But, by drawing on archaeological methods, modern archaeologists have filled the gaps. In the 1970s, Professor Su Bai (a Chinese archaeologist and bibliographer) published two papers to articulate the cultural heritage of the Tuoba Clan's southward migration route and verified the Tuoba Clan's memories of its migration history from the archaeological perspective.<sup>⑤</sup> According to Su Bai, Hulun Lake between the tomb site at Wangong Town of Old Barag Banner and the tomb site at Jalainur District of New Barag Right Banner of Hulunbuir<sup>⑥</sup> is “Daze” which was mentioned as the place where the Tuoba Clan first moved in *the Book of Wei*, and both the two tomb sites date back to the period when Tuoba Tuiyin (Emperor Xuan) led the Tuoba Clan to “migrate southward to Daze.” As for the Tuoba Clan's second southward migration recorded in *the Book of Wei*, Professor Su found the site at Yangjiayingzi Town in the south of Baarin Left Banner (Lindong

① Volume 300: *Encyclopaedia of the Four Barbarians, Encyclopaedia of Official Documents of the Qing Dynasty*, 1936, p. 7486 (bottom column).

② He, 1964, p. 323 (head column).

③ Ding, 1994, p. 985.

④ Kurakichi, 1986, pp. 153–155.

⑤ Su, 1977, pp. 28–46.

⑥ To search for more information about the tomb site at Wangong Town of Old Barag Banner, please refer to Pan Xingrong, *An Ancient Tomb Site at Suomu Township, Wangong Town of Old Barag Banner of Inner Mongolia*, *Archeology*, 1962, Vol.11, pp.590–591; Cultural Relics Working Team in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, *A Brief Report on Cultural Relics in the Ancient Tomb at Wangong Town of Old Barag Banner*, *Archeology*, 1965, Vol.6, pp.273–283. To search for more information about the tomb site at Jalainur District of New Barag Right Banner, please refer to Zheng Long, *The Ancient Tomb Site Cluster at Jalainur District* and Cultural Relics Working Team in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (ed.), *Selections of Materials on Cultural Relics in Inner Mongolia*, Hohhot: Inner Mongolia People's Publishing House, 1964, pp.101–114.

Town) of Liaoning (After 1979, Baarin Left Banner was put under Inner Mongolia),<sup>①</sup> so he concluded that Tuoba Jifen (Emperor Shengwu) had followed a southward route going southeastward via Hulunbuir—wading across the Olji Moron River (a tributary of the Liao River in the east of the southern section of the Greater Khingan Range)—arriving at the supposed “old haunt of Xiongnu.” Although some archaeologists had presented the possibilities of the attributes of Xianbei culture in excavation briefings on these sites before Professor Su, it was Su who first linked these sites and the migration and social development histories of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe together, which has had a significant impact and provided a classic example for later generations to explain the same type of tomb sites from a historical perspective.

Under the academic context, Gaxian Cave was discovered for the second time.

With a firm belief in Su’s research, Mi Wenping, head of the Cultural Relics Working Station at the Hulunbuir League, together with his fellows conducted four field trips to the Gaxian Cave (a natural cave located ten kilometers to the northwest of Alihe Town, Oroqen Autonomous Banner, Hulunbuir League, Inner Mongolia) between September 1979 and July 1980, and found the elegiac address on the walls inscribed by the envoy sent by Emperor Taiwu of the Northern Wei Dynasty after the act of ancestral worship during their fourth field trip on July 30, 1980. Despite minor discrepancies, the elegiac address inscribed on the walls is basically consistent with that recorded in *the Book of Wei*. Hence, this inscription can serve as ironclad evidence that the Gaxian Cave is exactly the Xianbei stone cave recorded in *the Book of Wei*. According to Mi Wenping’s description, with “smooth walls and a round roof, this stone cave is very commodious and of grand proportions, and the winding, deep side caves inside add a sense of forbidding religious air to it.”<sup>②</sup> This is the second discovery of the Gaxian Cave.

The authority and originality of the inscription on the walls of the Gaxian Cave has caused a nearly immediate sensation. Some researchers have hailed the rediscovery of the Gaxian Cave as “a milestone in Xianbei history studies,<sup>③</sup> and others consider it to be the fourth milestone in “Xianbei Studies.”<sup>④</sup> Although *the Book of Wei* recorded that “the Xianbei Tribe carved an ancestral temple out of stone,” it is obvious that the Gaxian Cave is a “natural” stone cave, and this shows that the relevant records in *the Book of Wei* are not completely accurate.<sup>⑤</sup> The rediscovery of the Gaxian Cave has affirmed that the “Great Xianbei Mountain” mentioned in *the Book of Wei* is the present-day Greater Khingan Range from where the Tuoba Clan migrated southward.<sup>⑥</sup> In the briefings published by Mi Wenping, he said, “Discovery of the elegiac inscription has provided solid evidence for the conclusion that the Gaxian Cave is the stone cave where the ancestors of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe lived. Therefore, we have strong grounds for drawing the inference that the Great Xianbei Mountain, whose location has perplexed historians for a long time is located in the neighborhood. Naturally, the thirty-six tribes consisting of ninety-nine aristocratic families would not locate their settlements too far away. Thus, the neighborhood of the Gaxian Cave is exactly the birthplace of

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① To search for more information about the site at Yangjiayingzi Town in the south of Baarin Left Banner, please refer to Working Team in Inner Mongolia of the Institute of Archeology of Chinese Academy of Sciences, *The Cultural Site and Tombs at Yangjiayingzi Town in the south of Baarin Left Banner of Inner Mongolia*, Archeology, 1964, Vol.1, pp. 36–43 and p. 53.

② Mi, 1981, pp. 1–7.

③ Chen, 1982, pp. 28–35.

④ Gan & Sun, 1986, p. 125.

⑤ Mi, 1997, p. 22.

⑥ Tong, 1981, pp. 36–42.

the Xianbei Tribe. Since ancient times, the Xianbei people have settled down in exuberant forests and deep mountains and have lived by ‘hunting’ for generations.”<sup>①</sup>

Historians are close to reaching a conclusion regarding the location of the “Great Xianbei Mountain” and the delineation of the sphere of activities of the Tuoba Clan’s ancestors because of the discovery of the Gaxian Cave.<sup>②</sup> Therefore, the migration history of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe has been confirmed and refined,<sup>③</sup> and the relationship between the southward migration and the social development of the Tuoba Clan has also been strengthened.<sup>④</sup> Also, according to the first section of Chapter One of the *History of Bei Wei (Bei Wei Shi)*, edited by Du Shiduo, “Origin and Migration History of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe” has two bases. First, there is evidence from the *Preface to Annals of the Book of Wei* and second, there is modern archaeological research data, such as the discovery of the Gaxian Cave, which supports the national origin and migration of the Tuoba Clan.<sup>⑤</sup> It is safe to say that the discourse in *the Book of Wei*, that the Tuoba Clan was descended from the Xianbei Tribe of the Donghu Confederation, can also be confirmed as an irrefutable and incontrovertible fact.<sup>⑥</sup>

The elegiac inscription on the walls of the Gaxian Cave read (in a different and punctuated format in comparison with the original):

On the twenty-fifth day of the seventh month of the fourth year (443) of the Taipingzhenjun reign, Emperor Taiwu (personal name Tuoba Tao) ordered Quriqan who was Chief Administrator of the Palace Receptionists as well as Li Chang and Fu Nou who were Vice Directors of the Secretariat to head a procession to conduct the act of ancestral worship with premium horses, oxen and other hairy animals as sacrifices:

Since the Tuoba Clan was born, the temple on the land of a small alien tribe has blessed generation upon generation of our people for nearly an aeon. Without the blessings of our ancestors, our great Tuoba Clan would not have migrated southward safely. Without the blessings of our ancestors, our great Tuoba Clan would not have grown to found our Northern Wei Dynasty based in the Central Plain. Without the blessings of our ancestors, our great Tuoba Clan would not have pacified the four quarters and brought benefits to our posterity.

Without the blessings of our ancestors, I, the sovereign, would not have ascended the throne to establish a reputation. Without the blessings of our ancestors, I, the sovereign, would not have carried forward *Xuanxue* and built resplendent and magnificent palaces. Without the blessings of our ancestors, I, the sovereign, would not have conquered and annihilated atrocious enemies and overawed the four quarters. Without the blessings of our ancestors, the distant tribe would not have sent an envoy to report the existence of our ancestral temple. I, the sovereign, was told by a small alien tribe that the ancestral temple was located on their land. Large numbers of our Tuoba people would like to pray for blessings from our ancestors.

① Mi, p. 6.

② Fei, 1989, p. 15.

③ Shu, 1984, pp. 40–50.

④ Chen, 1985, pp. 36–43.

⑤ Du, 1992, pp. 36–52.

⑥ Zhang, 1993, pp. 55–61.

Without the exploits of our ancestors, our Northern Wei Dynasty would not have developed from strength to strength. Without the blessings of our ancestors, our great Tuoba Clan would not have blossomed into such a large family. Hence, I, the sovereign, sent a procession to the cave to worship our ancestors for blessings and to wish our Tuoba Clan to become a large, happy and prosperous clan forever!

Kowtow: Under the witness of the Heaven above the head and the Earth below the feet,

Conduct the act of worship in the name of our deceased emperors and empresses!

Offer the sacrifices!

Inscribed by Envoys coming eastward to worship

It should be noted that there is a discrepancy between the elegiac address inscribed on the walls of the Gaxian Cave and that recorded in *the Book of Wei*. Specifically, the inscription on the cave walls is more detailed with a specific focus on extolling the exploits of Emperor Taiwu, while the version in *the Book of Wei* reads more humbly. How this discrepancy came to be is unknown. Also, the procession sent by Emperor Taiwu to the stone cave to pay respects mentioned in the inscription starts with “Quriqan, Chief Administrator of the Palace Receptionists.”<sup>①</sup> “*Kuliuguan* (Quriqan)” here should be a personal name.<sup>②</sup> According to current historical materials of stone inscriptions before the Northern Wei Dynasty moved its capital to Luoyang, all imperial members of the Tuoba Clan (namely those who are surnamed Tuoba) in these inscriptions were referred to only by first names. Hence here is a real possibility that Quriqan was an imperial family member, which can also be proved by his status of representing Emperor Taiwu to worship the ancestors. Yet, the records about this event in *the Book of Wei* only mention the Vice Director of the Secretariat, Li Chang, as deputy director, without a single word of Quriqan as general director, which in fact has degraded the worship ceremony (the participation of a royal family member as its general director fails to be reflected).<sup>③</sup> Why does *the Book of Wei* omit the name of the general director of this worship ceremony? It should be linked with many similar cases in *the Book of Wei*. Then, we can know that this kind of processing method of highlighting characters of the Huaxia people through omitting characters of the Inner Asian people is used in more than one case and reflects some tendency of history studies during the late Northern Dynasties.

Of course, these discrepancies do not exert even a slight impact on the relationship between the Gaxian Cave and the history of the Northern Wei Dynasty, because this relationship has gained historical authenticity since Emperor Taiwu of the Northern Wei Dynasty sent a procession to pay respects, and today’s archaeological discoveries have further assured that this historical authenticity would not experience any weakening or change in modern academic studies. Even though researchers have some certain reservations about the value of the Gaxian Cave as historical material, they have normally taken a position specific to “origin studies.” As to history studies of the Tuoba Clan, the origin studies therefrom include two main forms. To discourse upon the origin history of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe, the origin of the Tuoba Clan (namely the Gaxian Cave ) must be the start; the history of the Tuoba Clan (based on either reliable textual researches or unreliable legends) must be equated to that of the mainstream nation of the Northern Wei Dynasty in a real sense, namely the history of the whole ethnic grouping of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe. As a

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① Mi, p. 55.

② About the etymology of quriqan, please refer to Luo Xin’s *Studies on the Titulary of Medieval Inner Asian Peoples*, pp. 161–164.

③ *Volume 108a Treatise 4: Rituals 1, Book of Wei*, p. 2738.

new tradition of valuing archaeological material and first-hand historical data swept through modern history studies, the Gaxian Cave was rediscovered. Thus, the origin history of the Tuoba Clan that gained historical authenticity through traditional history studies can regain historical authenticity, in the modern academic sense, under new technological standards and discipline norms.

### 3. Emperor Taiwu and the invention of the stone cave in the Wuluohou Kingdom

Now, we will embark on an exploration of how the first discovery of the Gaxian Cave gained its historical authenticity.

According to *Volume 108a Treatise 4: Rituals 1, the Book of Wei*, a portion of the elegiac address by Li Chang states, “Without the blessings of our ancestors, the distant tribe would not have sent an envoy to report the existence of our ancestral temple. Everyone knows that whoever attempts to damage the old temple would be punished to death.” But the inscription on the walls of the Gaxian Cave states, “Without the blessings of our ancestors, the distant tribe would not have sent an envoy to report the existence of our ancestral temple. I, the sovereign, just know that our ancestral temple is located on their land.” Despite this small discrepancy in words, there is no difference between their meanings — the Northern Wei Dynasty did not know of the stone cave until the distant tribe sent an envoy to report it. Yet, more than 4,500 li (a traditional Chinese unit of distance that is defined as a half-kilometer) away from Pingcheng, the then capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty,<sup>①</sup> the Wuluohou Kingdom had no exchanges with the dynasty before the third month of the fourth year (443) of the Taipingzhenjun reign of Emperor Taiwu.<sup>②</sup> So how could it be known that a stone cave located to the northwest of its territory had a relationship with the Tuoba Clan which already moved away three hundred years ago<sup>③</sup> and whose clan name may have changed many times? First, we give the historical records the benefit of the doubt by reading the discourse as the case that the Wuluohou Kingdom on its part reported the stone cave to the Northern Wei Dynasty. Nevertheless, there is also a question arising therefrom but a different worded one: How could Emperor Taiwu of the Northern Wei Dynasty trust the report of the Wuluohou Kingdom’s envoy?

To answer these questions, we should start by changing our way of thinking. Kang Le pointed out that the discovery of the Gaxian Cave, as well as the inscription on its walls, “can at most lead up to the conclusion that the Gaxian Cave was regarded by the Tuoba people of the fifth century as the original settlement of their ancestors.”<sup>④</sup> Actually, the conclusion should be phrased in a different way: the discovery of the Gaxian Cave and the inscription on its walls can at most show that Emperor Taiwu of the Northern Wei Dynasty indeed wanted his people to believe that it was exactly the birthplace of the Tuoba Clan. If so, then what does this discourse, that the ancestral temple of the Tuoba Clan was located in the mountains to the northwest of the Wuluohou Kingdom, mean for Emperor Taiwu? We can analyze how this discourse benefited Emperor Taiwu.

First, this discourse could better serve the strategic interests of the Northern Wei Dynasty in Northeast

① *Volume 100: Biography of Wuluohou, Book of Wei*, p. 2224.

② *Volume 4b Annals: Shizu 2, Book of Wei*, p. 95.

③ Based on the discourses in *Book of Wei*, researchers can roughly calculate the time when Tuoba Tuiyin (Emperor Xuan) led Tuoba Clan to move away from Great Xianbei Mountain, namely about middle second century. Please refer to Yao Dali, *A Survey of the Early History of Tuoba Clan of Xianbei Tribe*, Fudan Journal, 2005, Vol. 2, pp. 19–27.

④ Kang, 1995, p. 5.

Asia at that time.

After the Northern Yan Dynasty was wiped out by the Northern Wei Dynasty in the second year (436) of the Taiyan reign of Emperor Taiwu, the overall international political landscape of Northeast Asia had experienced drastic changes — directly, the triumphant Northern Wei Dynasty replaced the defeated Northern Yan Dynasty as suzerain of this region; indirectly, the Rouran Khaganate was expelled from the Inner Asia Steppe, thus losing its political presence in this region. However, there still existed some indirect effects from the Rouran Khaganate, Murong Clan of the Xianbei Tribe and the Murong Clan's Feng Family who founded the Northern Yan Dynasty, as well as extremely strong apprehensions from a few powerful polities including Khitai and Goguryeo. Yet, at that time, the Northern Wei Dynasty had no time and energy to attend to these things, for Emperor Taiwu was mopping up the remaining forces of the Sixteen Kingdoms. In the third year (442) of the Taipingshenjun reign, Emperor Taiwu eventually put an end to the problems of Chouchi and Hexi, uniting Northern China in a real sense, thus putting himself on a par with Fu Jian, an emperor of the Former Qin Dynasty during the Sixteen Kingdoms period who also united Northern China. Then, Emperor Taiwu began to devote energy to consolidating his military victory, aspiring to be a ruler as successful as he was at being a conqueror. Therefore, he introduced a series of important measures across Northern China. Significantly, although replacing the Northern Yan Dynasty as suzerain of Northeast Asia, the Northern Wei Dynasty was faced with complicated political and military situations. Against this backdrop, if there was solid evidence that the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe itself hailed from and was a member of Northeast Asia, it would undoubtedly be good for the Northern Wei Dynasty to publicize the legitimacy of its ruling Northeastern China.

This thought leads us to reexamine the entire international political situation in Northeast Asia roughly when the Northern Wei Dynasty wiped out the Northern Yan Dynasty. The collapse of the Northern Yan Dynasty changed the political situation of Northeastern China — all tribes of Northeastern China that previously acknowledged allegiance to or were suppressed by the Northern Yan Dynasty had to establish ties with the Northern Wei Dynasty. Considering this, establishing these relationships with the Northern Wei Dynasty by forcing a link with the historical legend of the Tuoba Clan is perhaps understandable. Of course, there also exists another possibility — the Wuluohou Kingdom did not report the ancestral stone cave of the Tuoba Clan of its own accord. Interestingly, according to *the Book of Wei*, when being told such an important thing, Emperor Taiwu decided without any hesitation to send envoys to the distant Wuluohou Kingdom to pay respects, rather than conducting a preliminary investigation. This shows that Emperor Taiwu was in urgent need of strengthening the historical links between the Tuoba Clan and Northeast Asia. To that end, the Gaxian Cave was born of necessity by Emperor Taiwu.

Second, this discourse could help consolidate the idea that the Tuoba Clan was descended directly from the Xianbei Tribe.

With the development of the ethnic grouping situation in the steppes and the Great Wall region in Northern China during the late Xiongnu Confederation and the late Xiongnu era, there appeared new changes in ethnic grouping identities in Inner Asia. At that time, the tribe name of Xiongnu was devaluating, while the tribe name of Xianbei was elevating. According to *Book of the Later Han (Hou Han Shu)*, “In the first year of the Zhanghe reign, Xianbei stole into the region to the east of Shanggu, which was under the jurisdiction of Prince Zuo Xian, to attack Northern Xiongnu and gained a complete victory by beheading

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① *Volume 89: Treatise on the Southern Xiongnu, Book of the Later Han (Punctuation Edition)*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1965, p. 2951.

and skinning its Chanyu (the title used by the nomadic supreme rulers of Inner Asia). As a result, the Northern Xiongnu was thrown into complete disorder.”<sup>①</sup> For the Northern Xiongnu, the attack from the Xianbei group posed a more direct and fatal threat compared with other forces like the Eastern Han Dynasty. Of course, the hostility and corresponding military actions of the Southern Xiongnu, Dingling, Xianbei, Wuhuan and the regimes in the Western Regions towards the Xiongnu regime had a close relationship with the instigation, support and schemes of the Eastern Han Dynasty. Being under siege, the North Xiongnu regime eventually disintegrated. According to *Book of the Later Han*, “At that time, the Northern Xiongnu was in decline due to the betrayal of many clans. Seizing the opportunity, the Southern Xiongnu attacked it from the front, Dingling from the back, Xianbei from the left and the Western Regions from the right. Besieged on all sides, it realized that it could not survive there any longer, so it migrated to a distant place.”<sup>②</sup> Long-term confrontations with the Xiongnu regime and their dominance in political and military situations inevitably left a deep imprint on how the Xianbei people identified themselves. As the Xianbei replaced the Xiongnu as the rulers of the steppes, the Xianbei Tribe gathered supreme superiority and honor to its name. Its antagonist, the Xiongnu, were naturally reduced to a synonym for enemy and loser. According to *Book of the Later Han*, “After Chanyu of the Northern Xiongnu escaped, the Xianbei people seized his land and over 100,000 remaining Xiongnu people switched allegiance to the Xianbei Tribe. After this, the Xianbei Tribe developed from strength to strength.”<sup>③</sup> At that time, there was not a united and powerful Xianbei polity, so why did the “remaining Xiongnu people” switch “allegiance to the Xianbei Tribe”? This meant that a huge number of “remaining Xiongnu people” changed their tribal name to Xianbei, and naturally they were no longer Xiongnu people but Xianbei people since then.

During this new round of integration of the steppe societies, the original “remaining Xiongnu people” would certainly remold, to some extent, the incoming clans of the Xianbei Tribe. For these clans, this was a process of creolization<sup>④</sup> or acculturation to a degree.<sup>④</sup> There is a close link between the establishment of the Xianbei Confederation led by Khagan Tanshihuai and the addition of the “remaining Xiongnu people.” The Turki language element in the political titularies of clans of the Xianbei Tribe during the Wei and Jin dynasties was acquired during this historical process. This new steppe society, ruled by the Xianbei Tribe, inherited the political culture and social strata of the Xiongnu era to a great extent. The Xianbei had replaced the Xiongnu, which was once a synonym for glory but was internationally forgotten as a most influential and exalted banner across the steppes, thus forming new political traditions. Therefore, it is not only a physical possibility, but also a real fact that there existed non-Donghu people in so many clans who claimed to be Xianbei people in the

① *Volume 89: Treatise on the Southern Xiongnu, Book of the Later Han*, p. 2950.

② *Volume 90: Treatise on the Wuhuan, Book of the Later Han, Xianbei*, p. 2986. In Volume 30 of Records of the Three Kingdoms, there is a quote from Book of Wei writing that “Till the reign of Emperor Guangwu of the Han Dynasty, under the order of their respective Chanyu, Northern Xiongnu and Southern Xiongnu were locked in a seesaw fight. As a result, Xiongnu started to decline, while Xianbei begun to flourish. ... Later, Chanyu of Northern Xiongnu escaped, leaving up to 100,000 people behind. Hearing about that, the remaining Northern Xiongnu people styled themselves Xianbei soldiers and got settled in different places to the east of Liao River where many ethnic people lived together.” Please refer to pp.836–837 of this book. *Book of Wei* stressed the remarkable proportion of the “remaining Xiongnu people” in all Xianbei people living in the area to the east of Liao River, which helps a lot in understanding cultural traditions and social conditions of the eastern Xianbei.

③ The reason why the author uses creolization here isn't to argue from the perspective of language, but to draw on its social migration meaning from the perspective of anthropology. Please refer to: Derek Bickerton, Pidgin and Creole Studies, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 5 (1976), pp. 169–193. There are many classic cases of historical studies on this meaning, and the following two papers have enlightened me a lot: Ira Berlin, Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (1980), pp. 44–78; Kent G. Lightfoot and Antoinette Martinez, Frontiers and Boundaries in Archaeological Perspective, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 24 (1995), pp. 471–492.

④ About the historical process that is in particular emphasized by acculturation, please refer to Raymond H. C. Teske, Jr. and Bardin H. Nelson, Acculturation and Assimilation: A Clarification, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 1, Issue 2 (1974), pp. 351–367.

northern and southern parts of the Gobi Desert, and even the main body were not original Donghu people in the Xianbei society on the Mongolian Plateau during the second to third century.

When the fast-paced social integration of the original “remaining Xiongnu people” in the steppes and the incoming clans of the Xianbei Tribe was in progress, the newly formed Xianbei society had actually taken over the political role and strategic position of the Northern Xiongnu. Those remaining people of the Northern Xiongnu, who had no time to move away and were reluctant to join the Xianbei Tribe, had to migrate southward to seek refuge with the Southern Xiongnu under the control of the Eastern Han Dynasty. This migration expedited the Xianbei Tribe’s identifying the Southern Xiongnu as its new enemy. For the clans of the original Xianbei Tribe, antagonizing the Xiongnu was a historical condition to gain strength; for the remaining Northern Xiongnu people who had changed their tribal name to Xianbei, antagonizing the Southern Xiongnu was their long-established strategic line. As the two elements were combined, the repeated southward expeditions of the Xianbei Tribe was inevitable during the late Eastern Han Dynasty, and the Xianbei Tribe also replaced the Northern Xiongnu as the main outward threat to the Eastern Han Dynasty in the north.<sup>④</sup> Although the Xianbei formed a united polity only for a short time, this tribe had become a pole that could match the regime in the Central Plain, even only as an occasional and scattered hostile force. Therefore, many tribes like the Southern Xiongnu and Wuhuan that were sandwiched between the Central Plain and the Xianbei Tribe had to experience a binary differentiation. This is an important feature of the situation in the region to the north of the Wei and Jin dynasties during the late Han Dynasty.

Only with this backdrop in mind, we can understand the process of the gradual reevaluation of the tribal name of Xianbei in tandem with the gradual devaluation of the tribal names of Southern Xiongnu and Wuhuan in the northern borderland, and the reason why the Xiongnu and Wuhuan seldom appeared in the historical materials of the Western and Eastern Jin dynasties is related to their differentiation driven by the devaluation. About the origin history of the Tuoba Clan, *Book of Southern Qi (Nan Qi Shu)* wrote, “At the beginning, a Xiongnu maiden called Tuoba wedded Li Ling. Because the Hu people followed the tradition of taking their maternal names as the surnames of their offspring, *lu* people should be the posterity of Li Ling. But this background was a taboo for them — whoever said they were descendants of Li Ling shall be beheaded right away.”<sup>②</sup> Why did the Tuoba Clan place the background of Li Ling’s posterity under taboo? It is because they were reluctant to have a relationship with the Xiongnu. According to *the Book of Wei*, “Wuwan is a generic term referring to miscellaneous peoples from all sides submitting to the Xianbei Tribe.”<sup>③</sup> Tian Yuqing pointed out that Wuwan “has no race meaning technically,”<sup>④</sup> which is correct. Because of differentiation, Wuhuan also participated in the social integration in the steppes and the Great Wall regions during the Han and Wei dynasties, so it started to take on the new meaning of “zaren (miscellaneous peoples),” which was exactly the result of the devaluation of its tribal name. As early as the Western Jin Dynasty, “Chieftain Liu Hu of the Tiefu Tribe” who claimed himself to be a descendant of Chanyu of the Southern Xiongnu was called

① Crespigny, 1984, pp. 296–297.

② *Volume 57: Biography of Lu People of the Northern Wei Dynasty, Book of Southern Qi*, 1972, p. 993.

③ *Volume 113 Treatise 9: Official Ranks, Book of Wei*, p. 2971.

④ Tian, 2003, p. 152.

⑤ Textual Research of Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance, quoted from Liu Kun’s Collected Works, Volume 87 of Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1956, p.2744. Or please refer to Zhao Tianrui (ed.), Liu Kun’s Collected Works, Tianjin: Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House, 1996, p. 87.

⑥ Tang Changru, 1955, pp. 427–435. To request more information about Wuwan during the Wei and Jin dynasties, please refer to Chen Guocan, Wuwan during Wei and Jin Dynasties and “Commandant Protecting Wuwan,” Materials of History from Wei–Jin to Sui–Tang Dynasties edited by The Laboratory of History from Wei–Jin to Sui–Tang Dynasties, School of History of Wuhan University, Vol. 1, 1979, pp. 21–26.



“Wuwan Liu Hu” by Liu Kun.<sup>⑤</sup> From this, we can see that Wuwan (Wuhuan), a once influential tribal name, had devaluated to a name of miscellaneous *hu* peoples.<sup>⑥</sup> In addition, this background should also provide an explanation for why “Xianbei never was mentioned as *hu*”<sup>①</sup> in the historical materials about Medieval China. Calling Xianbei *hu* went against the naming conventions of Medieval China, while the Southern Dynasties referred to the Tuoba Clan as “*hulu*” to highlight its background of Xiongnu or its hybrid background. This is worth pondering.

Take the Tiefu Tribe as an example. According to *Liu Hu of Tiefu* in Volume 95 of *the Book of Wei*, “Northern people referred to people whose fathers were hu people and whose mothers were Xianbei people as Tiefu.”<sup>②</sup> Yao Weiyuan concluded from the record that, “We can know that ‘Tiefu’ is a hybrid clan of Xiongnu and Xianbei... As the Tuoba Clan was called not only Xianbei but also Xiongnu, Tuoba may be a different translation of Tiefu, namely a hybrid clan of Xiongnu and Xianbei. Hu people had a tradition of valuing the maternal line, so the Tuoba Clan called itself Xianbei and forbid anyone saying that they were descended from the Xiongnu.”<sup>③</sup> Ma Changshou proposed, “The clan name of Tuoba of the Northern Wei Dynasty was the result of the integration of the Xiongnu and Xianbei;” moreover, based on the discourse that Tiefu referred to people “whose fathers were hu people and whose mothers were Xianbei people,” he put forward that Tuoba was created to refer to people “whose fathers were Xianbei people and whose mothers were hu people.”<sup>④</sup> It deserves affirmation that he could have an insight into the historical process during which the Xianbei and Xiongnu had integrated into a new steppe clan, but he also created the idea that the Tuoba Clan was so named because “their fathers were Xianbei people and their mothers were *hu* people,” which has had a wide influence. The reason why Ma Changshou would make this mistake lies partly in his advocating the etymological interpretation of “Tiefu” in *the Book of Wei*, that “northern people referred to people whose fathers were *hu* and whose mothers were Xianbei as the Tiefu Tribe,” and partly in his readily believing the discourse that Shiratori Kurakichi established a far-fetched link between *dufe* in Manchu and “Tiefu” (Shiratori Kurakichi also thought Tiefu was an insulting appellation). According to Yao Weiyuan, the reasons why Helian Bobo changed his surname are because he wanted to “conceal the ugliness of his predecessors”<sup>⑤</sup> and he also believed that “Tiefu” was an appellation with negative connotations. As a matter of fact, Helian Bobo only changed *Tiefu* to *Tiefu*, and because *fu* (弗) had the same pronunciation with *fa* (伐) in the Xianbei language, the difference between the two names remained only in the spelling. Hence Helian Bobo’s changing *fu* to *fa* only removed the negative connotations of *fu* and added the aggressive connotations of *fa*, and did not change the original pronunciation of Tiefu. So how come it is an insulting appellation? Actually, like Tuoba, Tufa, Qifu and Yifu, Tiefu is also a compound name made up by an official rank, namely tie in this case, and an official beg, namely *fu* and *fa* in this case. Undoubtedly, it is a laudatory appellation. Originally, the Tuge Liu Family took Dugu (namely a different translation of Tuge) as their tribal name. Later after they escaped to the regions beyond the Great Wall and mixed with other tribes including the Xianbei, they were called Tiefu, which should be a result of the Dugu Tribe joining some certain polity in the regions beyond the Great Wall. Acquiring a new tribal name might be read as a case where the Tiefu Tribe had undergone a complete change — it was no longer Xiongnu, Tuge or

① Tang, p. 437.

② Volume 95: *Liu Hu of Tiefu*, *Book of Wei*, p. 2054.

③ Yao, 1958, p. 6.

④ Ma, 1962, p. 30.

⑤ Yao, p. 246.

Wuwan, but Xianbei.

Over the nearly two centuries from the collapse of the Northern Xiongnu to the antagonization between the Rouran and the Tuoba after the Rouran Khaganate seized the northern part of the Gobi Desert, this region (most of the time the southern part of the Gobi Desert was also included) had suffered a retrogression in the development of politics. As to the reasons, the engagement of the clans of the Preto Mongolic Xianbei Tribe in the social integration with the remaining Xiongnu people and the Turki-speaking tribes which originally lived in the northern part of the Gobi Desert is the main reason; of course, there is also another possible reason — as the Central Plain was then at a stage of political division, information about Northern China, especially the remote northern part of the Gobi Desert, failed to attract the attention of its regimes, thus leaving a big gap in “available historical literature.” If the records that both the Rouran and the Tuoba hailed from the southern part of the Gobi Desert in *the Book of Wei* are reliable, the historical process in which the Rouran finally established a regime headquartered in the northern part of the Gobi Desert to antagonize the regime in the southern part of the Gobi Desert bears a striking resemblance to that in which the Xiongnu, who hailed from the southern part of the Gobi Desert, finally headquartered their regime in the northern part of the Gobi Desert.

Comparatively speaking, the Tiefu Tribe has a relatively clear lineage. Perhaps this is why the discourse that Tiefu referred to people “whose fathers were *hu* and whose mothers were Xianbei” emerged. However, as likely as not, the Tuoba Clan which had dominated the right to discourse upon history had disempowered the Tiefu as a clan of the Xianbei Tribe, for the Tiefu Clan antagonized the Tuoba Clan during its rising. The Rouran are exactly in this case. Now, it’s generally believed that the Rouran are Mongolic, but there is no solid evidence.<sup>①</sup> The *Book of Southern Qi* referred to the Rouran as “Ruiruilu,” “they were hybrid *hu* people living in the regions beyond the Great Wall, and liked tressing their hair and wearing clothes overlaid to the left (*zuoren*).” Judging from these records, the Rouran bear a striking resemblance to the Tuoba Clan.<sup>②</sup> The absence of materials about the tribe to which the Rouran belonged in the history books of the Northern Dynasties has a relation with the political attitude the Northern Wei Dynasty had taken towards the Rouran. When Tuoba Gui revived the Kingdom of Dai, the Rouran were the main enemy of the Tuoba Clan and the leader of the forces against the Tuoba regime in the steppe in the southern part of the Gobi Desert. Although at last the Rouran had to headquarter its regime in the northern part of the Gobi Desert, it had still pursued a long-term hostile line towards the Northern Wei Dynasty. With a striking resemblance to the Tuoba Clan, the Rouran headquartered in the steppe in the northern part of the Gobi Desert became an enemy of the Tuoba Clan headquartered in the steppe in the southern part of the Gobi Desert. Hence, just like in the case of the Tiefu Clan, the Tuoba Clan had naturally rejected the Rouran outside the Xianbei regime. After seizing control of the southern part of the Gobi Desert and becoming the leader of the confederation of all tribes in the area to the north of Daizhou (*daibe*), the Tuoba Clan had monopolized the banner of the Xianbei. Exactly for this reason, the Tuoba Clan did not refer to other clans of the Xianbei Tribe as Xianbei. For example, *the Book of Wei* referred to the Yuwen Clan as Xiongnu,<sup>③</sup> and the Duan and Murong Clans, which had been recognized as a Xianbei Tribe by the Wei and Jin dynasties, as Tuhe, depriving them of the glory of possessing the tribal

① Golden, 1992, pp. 76–77.

② *Volume 59: Biography of Ruiruilu, Book of Southern Qi*, p. 1023.

③ Discoursing upon Yuwen Clan’s origin as descendants of Xiongnu was part of the historical construction work by the Eastern Wei and the Northern Qi dynasties after the Northern Wei Dynasty was disintegrated into the Eastern Wei and the Western Wei, based on the same principle in the case that clans of Xianbei Tribe had fought for the banner of Xianbe since the early Northern Wei Dynasty.

name of Xianbei. This represented the official position of the Northern Wei Dynasty and embodied the Tuoba Clan's policy of monopolizing the banner of the Xianbei.

For this reason, after wiping out the Northern Yan Dynasty dominated by the eastern Xianbei, Emperor Taiwu hurried to send envoys to the remote north to pay respects to the “ancestral stone cave of the Xianbei Tribe,” which can be seen as his last resort to establish Tuoba as a clan of the Xianbei Tribe and then monopolize the banner of Xianbei. After monopolizing the banner of Xianbei and marginalizing other clans of the Xianbei Tribe, the Tuoba Clan could establish a new Xianbei genealogical tree and history centering on the Tuoba Clan. In this way, the supposed heyday during the early development of the Tuoba Clan when it “governed thirty-six states with ninety-nine aristocratic families” is of course not its historical memory, but an invention of the Northern Wei Dynasty to establish the Tuoba Clan as the center of Xianbei's historical order.

Third, the discovery of the Gaxian Cave was part of the historical construction of the Tuoba group by Emperor Taiwu.

To rewrite the history of the Northern Wei Dynasty, Emperor Taiwu did the following two things. He ordered the *Records of Dai (Dai Ji)* to be written in Chinese and he ordered the *Songs of Dai on Zhenren (Zhen Ren Dai Ge)* to be compiled in the Xianbei language. Just as researchers have said, the records regarding the ancestors of the Tuoba Clan in *the Book of Wei: Preface to Annals* were mainly based on history books like *Records of Dai* and *Official Dynastic History of Northern Wei (Guo Shu)* edited by Deng Yuan, Cui Hao, et al which were based on the epics of the Tuoba Clan written in the Xianbei language, like *Songs of Dai on Zhenren*.<sup>①</sup> According to *the Book of Wei: Preface to Annals*, the Tuoba Clan can be traced back to the era of Emperor Yao and Emperor Shun, far earlier than other clans of the Xianbei Tribe, just as in the case of *Samguk sagi (History of the Three Kingdoms of Korea)* according to which the history of Silla started earlier than that of Goguryeo and Baekje. The historical reasons behind the two cases are the same. If the original basis of the *Preface to Annals* was the old epics of the Tuoba Clan, perhaps we must accept the possibility that the Tuoba Clan indeed has a time-honored historical memory.

However, can the oral epics be referenced as reliable historical materials? Anthropologists have long pointed out that the oral historical memories of ethnic groupings are of great instability. As David Henige argued in his famous monograph on African oral history, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Civi-mera*, the chronological dream of restoring the history of African tribes by depending on oral history is bound to be shattered, for the oral history is the political product of the real world and varies according to the real political situation.<sup>②</sup> Following this logic, we can never readily consider the epics of the Tuoba Clan, like the *Songs of Dai on Zhenren*, as old, continuous and stable historical memories, and especially can never believe that the historical memories of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe simply accrued from generation to generation. It is a certainty that the reason why the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe formed and changed its genealogical tree was to satisfy its own needs in political development. To be sure, the *Songs of Dai on Zhenren* and the oral Tuoba genealogical tree was born out of the necessity for identity construction when the polity of the Tuoba Clan of the Xianbei Tribe further matured and developed over time, so they may have had many different versions.

① Kang, p. 13.

② Henige, 1974, pp. 1–70.

The reason why the *Songs of Dai on Zhenren* was named with the Chinese phrase “真人 (*zhenren*)” was related to Emperor Taiwu changing the era name to Taipingzhenjun (太平真君) in 440. According to earlier usages during Medieval China, “真人 (*zhenren*)” can refer to both the immortalized commoners and the destined emperors. On Kou Qianzhi’s advice (Kou Qianzhi was a Taoist reformer of ancient China), Emperor Taiwu combined the two meanings and changed the era name to Taipingzhenjun. There seemed such jingles foretelling the appearance of the destined and immortalized emperor in North China in folk tale prophecy books that were popular among the people during the Sixteen Kingdoms period. For instance, *Book of Jin* (*Jin Shu*) recorded that Huang Hong “prophesied that the destined and immortalized emperor would appear in Northeast China,”<sup>①</sup> and that Shi Hu came by a jade tablet on Mount Hua bearing the words “the destined and immortalized emperor would appear in 352.”<sup>②</sup> As these prophecies were all related to the rise of the Murong Clan, they may have been created in the Murong’s Zhuyan period. However, by the time of the Northern Wei Dynasty, the place referred to as “northeast China” in these kinds of prophecies had changed to “the area between the Northern Yan and the Dai Kingdom” and “the area to the north of the Heng and Dai kingdoms (two regimes established by the Xianbei Tribe).” For example, *the Book of Wei* recorded that Wang Xian, Assistant Grand Scribe of the Later Yan Dynasty, prophesied that “the destined and immortalized emperor would appear in the area between the Later Yan Dynasty and the Dai Kingdom and would raise a battle-wise army with irresistible force,”<sup>③</sup> *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* (*Zi Zhi Tong Jian*) recorded that Qifu Chipan prophesied that “the destined and immortalized emperor would appear in the area to the north of the Heng and Dai kingdoms.”<sup>④</sup> These records probably resulted from the adaptation of the prophecies of the Murong Zhuyan in the Northern Wei Dynasty.

At the time when Emperor Taiwu was in the process of uniting North China, compiling and writing the dynastic history was the most important measure to enhance the construction of the dynastic ideological legitimacy. According to *the Book of Wei*, it was after the Northern Liang was wiped out that Emperor Taiwu appointed Cui Hao as Director of the Palace Library to compile the history,<sup>⑤</sup> which coincided with the historical event of Emperor Taiwu changing the era name to Taipingzhenjun. It is certainly during this period that the epic of *Songs of Dai* in the Xianbei language was renamed *Songs of Dai on Zhenren*. Therefore, the conclusion can be made that out of the same need, the *Official Dynastic History of Northern Wei* in Chinese and the *Songs of Dai on Zhenren* in the Xianbei language were edited at the same time and censored under the same system. For this reason, the creation of these two pieces of historical materials must have been coordinated for there is no question as to which one emerged first. Although *Official Dynastic History of Northern Wei* and *Songs of Dai on Zhenren* focused on contemporary history, namely the foundation history from Emperor Daowu to Emperor Taiwu, they must start with mythological legends about the birth and southward migration of their ancestors. Although these mythological legends were of course not newly fabricated in the reign of Emperor Taiwu, their appearances must have experienced significant changes because of repeated sorting and compiling. Therefore, from the inferences mentioned above, we can conclude that *Songs of Dai on Zhenren* and

① Volume 95: Arts, *Book of Jin* (Punctuation Edition), 1974, p. 2493.

② Volume 110: Murong Jun, *Book of Jin*, p. 2834.

③ Volume 105c Treatise 1: Celestial Phenomena 3, *Book of Wei*, p. 2389.

④ Volume 119: First Year of Jingping Reign of Prince of Yingyang of (Liu) Song, *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* (Punctuation Edition), 1956, p. 3757.

⑤ Volume 35: Cui Hao, *Book of Wei*, pp. 823–824.

⑥ Ascherson, 1988, p. 62.

*Official Dynastic History of Northern Wei* are, to quote Neal Ascherson's words, "using selected fragments of the past to build a new house."<sup>⑥</sup>

Against this backdrop, the appearance of the Wuluohou Kingdom's envoy and his report of the Xianbei ancestral stone cave were exactly what Emperor Taiwu needed. In other words, it was the needs of Emperor Taiwu that resulted in the Wuluohou Kingdom's report of the "ancestral stone cave of the Xianbei Tribe."

Till then, this paper has presented a comparatively clear picture of how the Gaxian Cave acquired its historical authenticity the first time. Although there is still no solid evidence that the relationship between Emperor Taiwu and the Gaxian Cave in the Wuluohou Kingdom is as simple as that between inventor and invention (if we borrow Hobsbawm's relevant terms in his *Introduction: Inventing Traditions*)<sup>①</sup>, there are strong grounds for believing that the first discovery of the Gaxian Cave cannot be used as reliable historical materials regarding the ancestral history of the Tuoba Clan three centuries ago, for this piece of historical material itself is merely a historical imagination in the interest of the real world. Obviously, there exists no history that can be traced back to the distant past along a single line for any crowd, group, or polity.

#### 4. Pitfalls between techniques and theories

Superficially, there seems to be no need for any additional discussion regarding how the second discovery of the Gaxian Cave in 1980 reacquired the historical authenticity, now that the process of how the first discovery of the Gaxian Cave acquired historical authenticity has been unveiled. But that is not the case. The mission of modern history studies is not to remove the inaccuracies of previous imaginations, but to analyze and restore the processes of how these imaginations have been identified as historical realities. It is such analyses and restorations that help unfold the truths in the reproduction of historical knowledge.

As discussed earlier, the reasons for the first discovery of the Gaxian Cave lie in the needs of Emperor Taiwu. After acquiring historical authenticity, the first discovery had the basic makings of an important piece of historical material, so it could be used as the basis for historical reimaginings by later researchers. Undoubtedly, the historical reimaginings based on this historical material would create new historical authenticity in accordance with Emperor Taiwu's design and with a commitment to the needs of Emperor Taiwu. Scholars engaged in the history of Northern Germanic peoples during the Roman Empire have found that the migration history of the Goths and the formation history of Goths groups are full of this kind of historical pitfalls. Herwig Wolfram, a famous historian on Germanic peoples, pointed out that the formation of an ancient group is a political rather than a consanguinity matter,<sup>②</sup> and all historical material pitfalls are directed toward the migrations that span a long time and distance and are center around the ruling people of the group.<sup>③</sup>

The second discovery of the Gaxian Cave has highlighted the role of modern studies, especially emerging disciplines in interpreting traditional historical materials on peoples. To be specific, they have further justified and consolidated the views the earliest traditional historical materials (traditional inventions,

① Hobsbawm, 1983, pp. 1–14.

② Wolfram, 1994, pp. 19–38.

③ Wolfram, 1988, pp. 36–40.

traditional imaginations) tried to express. Faced with such an academic problem, modern history, modern archeology, molecular biology, etc. seem to have trapped themselves into these pitfalls rather than avoiding them. Generally, the nature of new technologies, always coming with new disciplines, new theories and new methods, is to facilitate solutions to new problems. Yet, as a matter of fact, when traditional methods cannot provide a solution for many old problems, new methods and new technologies will be tried. For example, after the second discovery of the Gaxian Cave, based on archaeological findings in the cave, researchers declared the reliability of the records that the Tuoba Clan could be traced back to the era of Emperor Yao and Emperor Shun in *the Book of Wei*, “the distant history of the early Xianbei Tribe has been confirmed by the underground cultural strata in the Gaxian Cave.”<sup>①</sup> Here is another example, in the center of the Gaxian Cave stands a stone tablet, locally known as “stone table.” It has a relation with the “megalith culture” which was prevalent across ancient Northeast Asia.<sup>②</sup> However, researchers said, “These signs of manual carving lead us to believe that the ancient Xianbei people ‘carved an ancestral temple’ out of a natural cave.”<sup>③</sup> In this case, archeology as a modern discipline with heavy technological involvement has played a role in enhancing and consolidating long-established historical understandings.

Although Chinese humanities and social sciences, including history and archeology, are to a great extent luckily no longer subordinate to politics and ideology more than thirty years ago, their independent development still depends on innovations in theories and methods. Yet, the “stale and stereotyped theoretical” effect,<sup>④</sup> as Mr. Tong Enzheng pointed out, can also be seen — either overtly or covertly— in many historical explanations and archaeological data. History studies have a tradition of criticizing historical materials, but why do they depart from tradition when dealing with such historical materials as the Gaxian Cave? Many factors concerning historical theories have combined to cause this departure. For instance, the linear historical model delineating the evolution of economic production from a low level to a high level (hunting–nomadic herding–farming) is to construct human social development processes under the framework of the theory of evolution. This construction has been confirmed by the origin and migration history (Gaxian Cave – Hulun Lake–Yin Mountains – Pingcheng – Luoyang) of the Tuoba Clan’s ancestors and the second discovery of the Gaxian Cave seems to have happened to provide the necessary yet missing link. Meanwhile, according to some theories of history studies, the nation should develop from clan to tribe, then to confederation, and then to country, and the history of the Tuoba Clan has provided perfect evidence for such a national development model. And what the Gaxian Cave unfolds is the beginning scene of this clan’s origin history. With the Gaxian Cave, a complete discourse on the origin and development history of the Tuoba Clan becomes a physical possibility. Here, the influence of historical theories and methods on historical perceptions has served as a reminder that a systematic rethink of the theoretical traditions in which we have been rooted is necessary.<sup>⑤</sup>

It is necessary to reexamine the way that we apply new technologies to solving traditional problems that perplex traditional disciplines so as to reach a conclusions which traditional disciplines are eager for under the traditional academic framework. Take DNA technology of molecular biology as an example — researchers

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① Shu, p. 40.

② Koichi, 1990, pp. 257–303.

③ Chen, p. 29.

④ Tong, 1995, pp. 177–197.

⑤ Bólint, 2010, pp. 145–182.

⑥ Wei & Qin, 2011, pp. 353–427.

have used it to explore the migration activities of ethnic groups during the most recent historical period,<sup>⑥</sup> about which we must be vigilant. Recently, someone tried to use the DNA of the descendants of Cao Cao (a Chinese warlord, politician and poet of the Eastern Han Dynasty) to verify the authenticity of Cao Cao's Mausoleum. Although this may seem ridiculous to some, it has an ideological method and a theoretical basis that are not radically different from, even actually the same with such cases as using DNA technology to explore academic assumptions regarding the biological differences between various ethnic groups, for example Turkic and Mongolian people, or Han and Dai people.

Since Richard Lewontin published his paper titled *The Apportionment of Human Diversity in Evolutionary Biology* in 1972,<sup>①</sup> traditional taxonomy which uses labels such as "race" to divide humans into groups and subgroups is losing its biological foundation. Researchers now believe that human diversity in evolutionary biology mainly exists among individuals and comparatively speaking, the differences between regions and ethnic groups are superficial. It is impossible to draw a scientifically well-grounded boundary between races and ethnic groups. According to recent research on the relationships between genes and race, as well as genes and ethnic groupings, the current status of modern human genetic diversity was formed at an accelerated pace after humans embarked on their Out-of-Africa migrations about 100,000 years ago (or 50,000 to 60,000 years ago at the latest), and is the product of a long time of repeated exchanges of human genes between individuals and groups. This process is "reticulate evolution," and the so called "race" is a much later socio-cultural construct.<sup>②</sup> This kind of "socio-cultural construct" has a political nature.

As Iain Banks stressed, like "nation," ethnic grouping is also a kind of conscious creation.<sup>③</sup> Exactly in this sense, some biologists have put forward the idea of "race finished."<sup>④</sup> Using genetic data to judge the attribution of races or ethnic groupings is based on the traditional and stale perception of believing humans ever branched off into different and independent human groups which evolved on their own in different places across the world.<sup>⑤</sup> Researchers hold that DNA data cannot effectively differentiate the complicated social strata of human society caused by skin, language, religion and historical tradition.<sup>⑥</sup> Therefore, attempting to draw a boundary between these complicated historical constructions based on genetic differences from the biological perspective, or in turn, inferring the regional distributions and migrations of ancient human groupings based on unreliable classification standards would ultimately fail to obtain reliable results. Therefore, what is the scientific basis for the practice of judging the attribution of ethnic groups through genetic differences?

Here, we need to introduce the concept of remote sensing technology, namely "time resolution." In China, this has a couple of translations. As a remote sensing science term, time resolution refers to the minimum distance the remote sensing imaging can discern two adjacent images of the same object on the ground. This is the period of the sensor's repeated imaging towards the same object on the ground. In other words, it means minimum time interval between two adjacent remote sensing observations and is an important technological indicator used to assess the sensor performance and the remote sensing information. After a continuous period

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① Lewontin, 1972, pp. 391-398.

② Tattersall & DeSalle, 2011, pp. 144-157.

③ Banks, 1996, pp. 1-11.

④ Sapp, pp. 164-168.

⑤ Weiss & Long, 2009, pp. 703-710.

⑥ Fullwiley, 2011, pp. 116-126.

of time is discretized, the shorter the minimum time interval is, the higher the resolution will be and vice versa. In the case of historical time, historical literature and their interpretations are a main factor in deciding the time resolution of history. As a matter of course, the uneven distribution of historical literature results in the uneven distribution of time specific to history. For this reason, the time resolution of history shows a remarkable continuous change from high levels to low levels. By and large, the closer to today a time is, the higher its time resolution will be. It is otherwise very understandable, but in fact, people normally confound the time specific to history with that specific to natural science, tending to see the time specific to history as even, and understand or imagine all the past time based on the same time resolution. One of this tendency's results is overinterpreting isolated archaeological or historical literature findings. Findings of new historical literature, advancements in archaeological excavation, breakthroughs in gene technology as well as any useful new methods and technologies all may shed new light on the dark time and space. But only when they form continuous distributions can their time resolutions of our concerns be increased. Just as Mark Pluciennik said, in a way, neither historical genetic studies nor historical comparative linguistics can solve the problem of time resolution.<sup>①</sup>

Like any origin studies on human groups, national origin studies under the framework of national history is beset with these types of cognition pitfalls resulting from the neglect of inherent differences in time resolution. In this sense, myths and legends have created an extremely high time resolution, while new isolated findings cannot effectively increase the time resolution of relevant periods due to a lack of continuity. For this reason, attempts to discourse upon the history of the far distant past, in particular the prehistory, are of cause unrealistic and risky. Sima Qian (a Chinese historian of the early Han Dynasty) was acutely aware of this historical problem, so in dealing with the old myths and legends about the Yellow Emperor, he held that "they are so badly-turned that it would be difficult for even a learned man from a scholar-gentry family to judge whether they are true or false,"<sup>②</sup> and did not insist on delineating a detailed and complete picture of prehistory. Recognizing the differences in time resolution of history is recognizing the constraints and limitations of historical cognition. Judging from the principle of the negative correlation between the time resolution and the length of the time to be traced, any studies on the details of origins is full of doubts and potential dangers.

How does national history, especially national origin history, reposition itself? In the author's view, the new position national history should take is to banish all kinds of myths that result from old pitfalls. We need to reveal the mistakes of old knowledge. Then we need to develop an understanding of the political nature and the instability of nations and ethnic groupings in theory and methodology and interpret all discourses in a critical manner. Considering this new position, it is necessary to reexamine historical materials related to national histories and to give new discourses on the histories of nations and ethnic groupings. Only under this condition is there a possibility for the national history discipline to succeed in delivering its concerns regarding healthy social lives.

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① Pluciennik, pp. 35–58.

② *Volume 1: Basic Annals of Five Emperors, Records of the Grand Historian (Punctuation Edition)*, 1959, p.46.



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