


RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Evolution of the Tang Political Elite and its Marriage Network

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Abstract

How did the Tang political elite evolve between the seventh and ninth centuries? Using network analysis and a large prosopographic database, this article approaches this question from four perspectives: the marriage network of political elites, the backgrounds of chief ministers, the composition of the capital elite during three time slices, and the makeup of the provincial elite. Despite important continuities in the elite marriage network's basic structure, there were also significant discontinuities. Between the seventh and eighth centuries, Luoyang emerged as a secondary political center, and Luoyang-based families—including so-called “marriage-ban” clans—acquired a renewed significance, partly at the expense of old southern clans, whose political significance declined over the course of the dynasty. In addition, the political divide between capital and provinces grew over time, culminating in the ninth century with capital-based men occupying nearly all significant provincial posts and provincials serving only locally and in second-tier offices.

Keywords: Tang Dynasty; prosopography; network analysis; aristocracy; elites

Introduction

This paper examines how a large prosopographic database of tens of thousands of individuals in combination with network analysis can provide new insight into the evolution of the political elite over the course of the Tang Dynasty (618–907). In a previous work, I focused specifically on the structure of the elite in the final century of Tang rule, exploring how a group of several dozen old “aristocratic” families—whose ancestors had served in office generation after generation for hundreds of years—managed to dominate top bureaucratic offices partly by relying on the social capital embedded in a tightly knit marriage network based at the capital.¹ Here, I expand the temporal scope of my analysis to include the seventh and eighth centuries, looking not at the Tang elite at a single moment in time, but rather at how it evolved over a period of three centuries.

¹Nicolas Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014).

My hope is that the methodologies I showcase here can fruitfully be used to analyze political power in other periods or places.

As is well known by historians of the Tang, there is every reason to expect that the political elite changed in fundamental ways between the Sui reunification in 589 and the collapse of the Tang following Huang Chao's sack of the capital cities in 880. To begin with, the unification process itself brought about a reorganization of the elite families that had once served the regional dynasties. Though the Sui and the Tang were both direct successors of the Western Wei and Northern Zhou based in the northwest, they made every effort to welcome into their newly centralized bureaucracies the descendants of men who had in the mid-sixth century served in the northeast (under the Eastern Wei and the Northern Qi) or the south (under the Southern Liang and the Chen). A few decades after the founding of the Tang, the rise to power of Empress Wu in the second half of the seventh century led to a new round of political reshuffling as the monarch sought to bolster her power and legitimacy by purging her opponents and recruiting new men loyal to her. Finally, the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), which culminated in the complete autonomy of several provinces in the northeast, prompted a total reordering of the northeastern local elite and a significant restructuring of the administration elsewhere.

Aside from these political developments, there were also institutional innovations that affected the composition of the political elite. In the Sui and early Tang, the implementation of the law of avoidance (which mandated that officials not serve near their places of origin), as well as the elimination of the office of Recommending Legate 中正 (a member of the local elite who recommended local talent for government service), diminished the power of locally entrenched families. The expansion of the civil service examination under Empress Wu and the development in the mid-eighth century of provincial governments—which recruited their staffs without central government oversight—both in principle offered new routes of upward mobility into the officeholding class. Meanwhile, the deregulation of land (with the demise of the “equal-field” system) in the post-An Lushan Period and a concomitant expansion of the economy plausibly produced new landed and economic elites who could take advantage of these new opportunities to enter officialdom.² How did this series of political and institutional developments impact the political elite?

Needless to say, the question of what happened during the Tang to the “medieval aristocracy” has attracted considerable attention in the scholarly literature over the years.³ Much of the most influential work broaching this topic dates to the golden age of social history, in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.⁴ This high-quality scholarship

²For an excellent overview of the economic consequences of the An Lushan Rebellion, see Richard Von Glahn, *The Economic History of China: From Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 210–17.

³The use of the term “aristocracy” to describe the Tang political elite remains contentious. For arguments against its use, see David Johnson, *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977) and Dennis Grafflin, “The Great Families in Medieval South China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41.1 (1981), 65–74. For arguments in favor, and a discussion of the Tang political elite as a “bureaucratic aristocracy,” see Tackett, *Destruction*, 11–12, 61–66, as well as the discussion of the “medieval aristocracy” in Nicolas Tackett, “The Social Structure of Sui-Tang China,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 4: *Sui and T'ang China, 589–906 AD, Part Two*, edited by Anthony Deblasi (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

⁴See, for example, Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, *Tangdai zhengzhi shi shulun gao* 唐代政治史述論稿 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1947); Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan*

remains a necessary starting point for anyone wishing to examine the Tang elite. It should be noted, however, that some of this scholarship is influenced in no small part by dated meta-narratives and ways of conceptualizing history. Thus, the perspective (perhaps influenced by a Marxist conceptualization of history) that sees social change as driven by the struggle between an older social class and a newly emergent one, in combination with a faith (rooted in traditional Chinese historiography) in the power of institutional change to transform society, has led to the commonly held view that the old “aristocratic” families declined inexorably over the entire course of the Tang, as a result of the institutional changes described above, in conjunction with the inability of those families to compete with a newly risen “bureaucratic” elite. In fact, empirical evidence suggests that the old families maintained their dominance up until the very end of the dynasty without any serious competition.⁵ But this does not mean that one cannot detect other sorts of fundamental changes in the structure of the political elite as a consequence of Tang political and institutional developments.

New sources of biographical data (notably the vast troves of funerary epitaphs excavated in recent decades), the digitization of this data into large datasets composed of tens of thousands of individuals, and new digital techniques together offer the possibility of reconsidering the evolution of the Tang political elite from a fresh perspective. Whereas earlier scholarship was often based on the synthesis of anecdotal evidence culled from a broad assortment of sources, or on detailed case studies of individual clans, the very large biographical datasets now available permit taking a more systematic and holistic view of the entire sociopolitical elite in its entirety. Moreover, the fact that much of the new data is based on excavated epitaphs (which dig deeper into society than dynastic history biographies and other traditional sources) means one can now take into consideration a much broader swathe of elite society.⁶ Network analysis also permits a reconceptualization of social groupings. Earlier scholarship typically classified people into categories based on apparent class background, or classified families into regional blocks based on a claimed ancestral place of origin, then (whether due to source or methodological limitations or to ideological proclivity) assumed that these

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); Tang Zhangru 唐長孺, “Menfa de xingcheng ji qi shuailuo” 門閥的形成及其衰落, *Wuhan daxue xuebao (renwen kexue ban)* 1959.8:1–24; Sun Guodong 孫國棟, “Tang Song zhi ji shehui mendi zhi xiaorong: Tang Song zhi ji shehui zhuanbian yanjiu zhi yi” 唐宋之際社會門第之消融: 唐宋之際社會轉變研究之一, *Xinya xuebao* 4.1 (1959), 211–304; Tonami Mamoru 磯波護, “Chūsei kizokusei no hōkai to hekishōsei” 中世貴族制の崩壊と辟召制, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 21.3 (1962), 245–70; Mao Hanguang 毛漢光, “Tangdai tongzhi jieceng shehui biandong: cong guanli jiating beijing kan shehui liudong” 唐代統治階層社會變動: 從官吏家庭背景看社會流動 (PhD thesis, Guoli zhengzhi daxue zhengzhi yanjiusuo, 1968); David Johnson, “The Last Years of a Great Clan: The Li Family of Chao chūn in Late T’ang and Early Sung,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37.1 (1977), 5–102; Johnson, *Medieval Chinese Oligarchy*; Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China: A Case Study of the Po-ling Ts’ui Family* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Mao Hanguang 毛漢光, “Cong shizu jiguan qianyi kan Tangdai shizu zhi zhongyang hua” 從士族籍貫遷移看唐代士族之中央化, *Zhongguo zhonggu shehui shilun* 中國中古社會史論 52.3 (1981), 421–510.

⁵Sun Guodong, “Tang Song zhi ji shehui mendi,” 245, 283; Mao Hanguang 毛漢光, “Zhongguo tongzhi jieceng zhi shehui chengfen” 中古統治階層之社會成分, in *Zhongguo zhonggu shehui shilun* 中國中古社會史論 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1988), 31–50; Johnson, *Medieval Chinese Oligarchy*, 131–41; Tackett, *Destruction*, 160–78.

⁶For exceptional early studies based on large datasets derived in part from epitaphs, see the work of Mao Hanguang, esp., “Tangdai tongzhi jieceng shehui biandong,” as well as the articles republished in Mao Hanguang 毛漢光, *Zhongguo zhonggu shehui shilun* 中國中古社會史論 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1988).

categories constituted cohesive social realities. By analyzing very large quantities of genealogical data in the aggregate and reconstructing networks of kin and marriage ties, one can shift one's analysis of social groupings from a theoretical to an empirical basis. One no longer needs to assume that feelings of solidarity existed between individuals sharing common characteristics; one can reconstruct categories of people based on demonstrable social connections.

Most of the data used here comes from two sources: the August 2017 release of the China Biographical Database (CBDB), and version 1 of the Prosopographic and Social Network Database of the Tang and Five Dynasties (TBDB), compiled as part of an earlier book project and largely incorporated into the recent versions of CBDB. Of particular relevance here, CBDB incorporates genealogical and marriage data taken from the several thousand Tang epitaphs included in the two-volume *Tangdai muzhi huibian* 唐代墓誌彙編 and its sequel volume.⁷ My own TBDB focuses primarily on ninth-century epitaphs, but includes epitaphs found in a much broader assortment of publications. It also incorporates the genealogical tables of the imperial clan and families of chief ministers included in the eleventh-century *New Tang History* (新唐書). For the present article, I added large amounts of new data culled from recently published collections of epitaphs, with particular emphasis on three time slices (650 to 660, 720 to 730, and 800 to 810) described in more detail below, on epitaphs for members of families that produced chief ministers, and on epitaphs spanning the Sui-Tang period from provincial north China.⁸ One consequence of combining datasets in this way was that it was then necessary for me to disambiguate (i.e., identify and merge) hundreds of duplicate entries. Correctly identifying duplicate entries—e.g., determining conclusively that the father-in-law mentioned in one epitaph was the same man as a member of one of the large patrilineal families with the same name—was particularly important in order to place individuals correctly within large family trees and identify as many marriage ties between families as possible. Finally, let me note that, for the reader's reference, version 1.5 of TBDB (available for download) includes the queries used to produce the figures and tables of the present study.⁹

⁷Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 and Zhao Chao 趙超, eds., *Tangdai muzhi huibian* 唐代墓誌彙編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1991); Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, eds., *Tangdai muzhi huibian xujing* 唐代墓誌彙編續編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2001).

⁸Some of the important recent sources of epitaphs from Chang'an and Luoyang that I turned to are *Chang'an xinchu muzhi* 長安新出墓誌 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2011); Qi Yuntong 齊運通, ed., *Luoyang xinhua qichao muzhi* 洛陽新獲七朝墓誌 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012); Guo Maoyu 郭茂育 and Zhao Shuisen 趙水森, eds., *Luoyang chutu yuanyang zhi jilu* (2012) 洛陽出土鸞鴛誌輯錄 (2012) (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan, 2012); Zhao Junping 趙君平 and Zhao Wencheng 趙文成, eds., *Qin Jin Yu xinchu muzhi souyi* 秦晉豫新出墓誌蒐佚 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan, 2012); Mao Yangguang 毛陽光 and Yu Fuwei 余扶危, eds., *Luoyang liusan Tangdai muzhi huibian* 洛陽流散唐代墓誌彙編 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan, 2013); Zhao Liguang 趙立光, ed., *Xi'an beilin bowuguan xincang muzhi xubian* 西安碑林博物館新藏墓誌續編 (Xi'an: Shaanxi shifan daxue, 2014); *Xi'an xinhua muzhi jicui* 西安新獲墓誌集萃 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2016); Li Ming 李明, et al., eds., *Chang'an Gaoyang yuan xin chutu Sui Tang muzhi* 長安高陽原新出土隋唐墓誌 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2016); Qi Yutong 齊運通 and Yang Jianfeng 楊建鋒, eds., *Luoyang xinhua muzhi 2015* 洛陽新獲墓誌 二〇一五 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017). For some of the important recent sources of provincial epitaphs from North China, see notes to Figure 5. Finally, in order to expand the temporal scope of my epitaph survey to pre-Tang times, I included a large number of epitaphs taken from Wang Qiyi 王其禪 and Zhou Xiaowei 周曉薇, eds., *Suidai muzhiming huikao* 隋代墓誌銘彙考 (Beijing: Xianzhuan shuju, 2007).

⁹The database circulates as a Microsoft Access file entitled *tddb015.accdb*; it can currently be downloaded from my department website and from www.ntackett.com.

The Elite Marriage Network

The basic building blocks of the Tang marriage network of political elites consisted of what I have previously termed “patriline.” A “patriline” is defined to be the largest multi-generational family tree of patrilineal kin that can be reconstructed on the basis of father–son and father–daughter relations that are attested in historical sources.¹⁰ Unlike much past scholarship, which has often depended primarily on claims to particular great clan choronyms (i.e., the place of ancestral origin of a famous family of the same surname) as a way of identifying clan membership, the patrilines in this study have all been defined empirically on the basis of extant genealogical data. Given the fragmentary nature of much of the underlying source material, the majority of reconstructed patrilines—especially those based on epitaph data described below—contain only a handful of individuals (e.g., a great grandfather, a grandfather, a father, and two sons).¹¹ But other patrilines were much larger, sometimes with hundreds of known members spread across a dozen or more generations.

The major source of data for patrilineal ties remains the *New Tang History* genealogical tables, which identify over 17,000 father–son ties. Consequently, it is no surprise that the largest reconstructed patrilines are families represented in these tables. But genealogical data culled from excavated tomb epitaphs (which in my database consists to date of nearly 15,000 discrete father–son and father–daughter ties) will soon surpass the *New Tang History* tables in importance, and they have already permitted the reconstruction of a few previously unknown large patrilines. Tomb epitaphs are also much richer sources of marriage data, since dynastic histories and other traditional sources of Tang history usually identify only the marriage partners of emperors and imperial princesses. Unfortunately, epitaphs do not always provide sufficient details to confirm the identities of a woman’s husband or a man’s father-in-law, making disambiguation difficult. By surveying several thousand epitaphs, it has nevertheless been possible to identify hundreds of marriage connections between patrilines.

Figures 1 and 2 depict the core of a large marriage network of Tang political elites. The estimated dates of the marriages—each calculated based on the known or estimated birth dates of the groom—span the entire Sui-Tang period. The figures thus constitute a reformulation of the ninth-century marriage network in my previous study, with the addition of seventh- and eighth-century data.¹² Each node in the network represents a patriline; the thickness of lines between nodes is proportional to the number of known marriages between the two patrilines in question. Large numbers of leaves and minor branches of the network (i.e. small patrilines with few demonstrable ties to the center of the marriage network) have been eliminated to reduce clutter. In all, 87 patrilines—representing only 7 percent of the patrilines in the total network but 60 percent of known individuals—and 384 marriages are depicted in the figures.¹³

¹⁰One exception is that, largely following the lead of the genealogical tables of chief ministers in the *New Tang History*, my database treats as distinct the major sub-branches of many of the largest families—branches that typically branched off well before the founding of the Sui.

¹¹Especially in the capital region, it may be that many of these small patrilines were in fact sub-branches of large politically powerful families, though genealogical evidence is (as of yet) lacking to confirm the connections.

¹²For a diagram of the network on the basis of ninth-century data primarily, see Tackett, *Destruction*, 123.

¹³The 87 patrilines include 14,444 known members. If one includes the leaves and minor branches eliminated from the figures (filtering the data only on the giant component), the entire marriage network contains 1257 patrilines; 24,131 individuals; and 1639 marriages. The majority of the excluded patrilines are

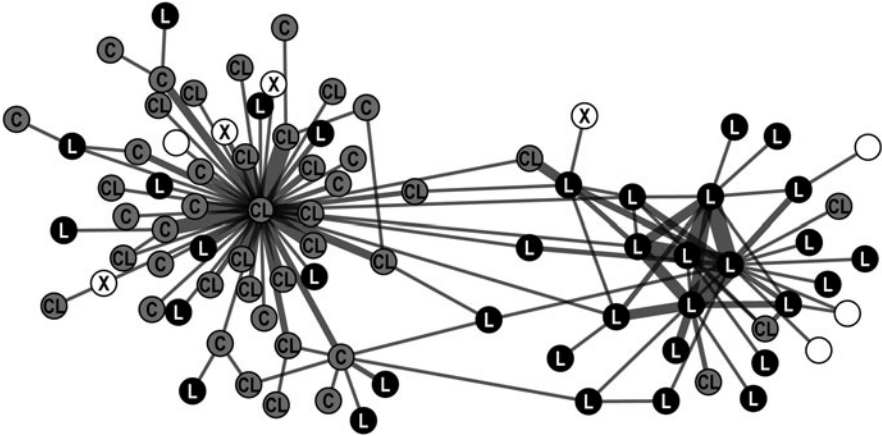


Figure 1. Marriage network of Tang political elites (with patriline home base if known)
Note: Each node represents one “patriline” (as defined in main text); width of edges connecting nodes is proportional to number of known marriages between two patriline groups in question, but with edges representing only one known marriage tie excluded. Letters indicate home bases, defined as place of burial of at least 78 percent of kinsmen and unmarried kinswomen whose place of burial is known on basis of extant epitaphs (excluding temporary burials except those explicitly said in epitaph to be near ancestral cemetery). “L” indicates Luoyang; “C” indicates Chang’an; “CL” indicates patriline groups based in both Chang’an and Luoyang and/or in the Capital Corridor connecting the two cities; “X” indicates provincial sites outside of the Capital Corridor; blank circles indicate patriline groups for which there is insufficient burial data to determine home base. For the reader’s convenience, nodes also color-coded (black, grey, or white) according to patriline home base. Data source: *JCH_Figure123_edges* and *JCH_Figure123_nodes* in TBDB ver. 1.5, with leaves and minor branches removed using Gephi filter *Giant Component* (Edge Weight (≥ 2 , Range (Weighted Degree) (≥ 3))), and layout determined using Force Atlas algorithm.

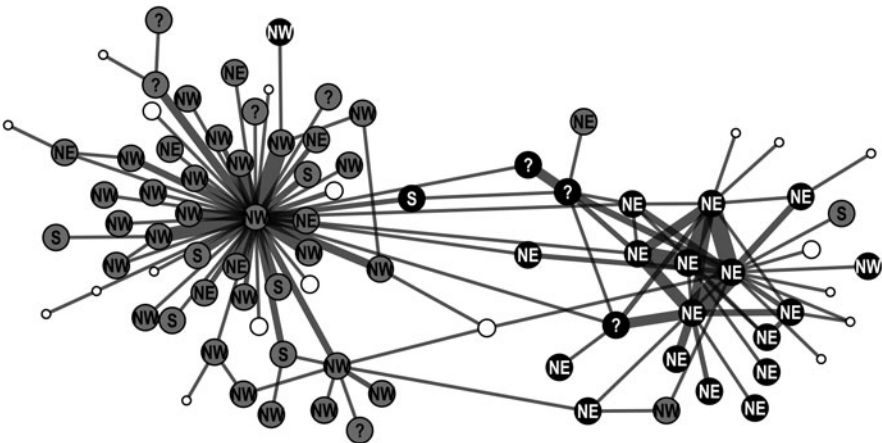


Figure 2. Marriage network of Tang political elites (with ancestral affiliation to pre-Sui regional regimes if known)
Note: Uses same data and network layout as Figure 1, but with nodes labelled differently for analytical purposes. NE = pre-Sui northeastern regimes (Eastern Wei and Northern Qi); NW = pre-Sui northwestern regimes (Western Wei and Northern Zhou); S = pre-Sui southern regimes (Southern Liang and Chen); ? = multiple or unclear pre-Sui regional affiliations. Black nodes identify branches of the “marriage-ban” clans. Medium-sized white nodes identify patriline groups whose officeholding ancestries can only be traced using extant sources back to the Sui; small white nodes identify patriline groups for whom no pre-Tang officeholding ancestors have yet been identified.

As suggested in Figure 1, the network was capital-based—that is, the home base of most patrilineal families was either the Western Capital of Chang'an (denoted with a "C"), the Eastern Capital of Luoyang ("L"), or split between the two capitals and/or the "Capital Corridor" linking the two cities together ("CL"). In addition, by Tang times, most patrilineal families had served in office for many generations, going back to the pre-Sui period (gray and black nodes in Figure 2). This network embodied a capital-based bureaucratic aristocracy.

Much like in the ninth-century case, and as analyzed in my book, one recognizes two prominent marriage cliques. The clique on the right was more diffuse, lacking any single dominant patriline. It was composed almost exclusively of Luoyang-based families (Figure 1), most of which had served northeastern regimes in pre-Sui times (Figure 2). Moreover, the families at the core of this marriage clique were all branches of the very most eminent "marriage-ban" clans (black nodes)—clans that were in early Tang times forbidden to intermarry in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt by the throne to diminish their prestige. In contrast to the marriage-ban clique, the clique on the left was organized around the imperial clan (represented by the node at the center of the clique). It was more heterogeneous, containing many families based in Chang'an, but also some families based in Luoyang or other parts of the Capital Corridor. The clique was dominated by families that had served the northwestern dynasties, but also included northeastern families. A few patrilineal families with southern origins also belonged to this clique, though overall the southern families occupied a relatively peripheral position in the marriage network.

Needless to say, by aggregating three centuries of marriage data, Figures 1 and 2 tell us nothing about the evolution of the marriage network over time. To provide a sense of chronological change, Figure 3 depicts the network as it existed in three different time periods: 600–700 CE, 700–760 CE, and 780–880 CE. The two cliques are recognizable in all time periods, though there is a greater density of marriage ties within the marriage-ban clique. A possible explanation is that the marriage-ban clans preferred increasingly to intermarry with each other. Alternatively, perhaps due to a heightened sense that good marriages defined the most prestigious families, later epitaphs made more of a point to identify such good marriages explicitly.¹⁴

One can also assess temporal change statistically rather than graphically. Looking just at marriages involving clique members, one finds long-term continuities in the preference for intra-clique marriages. In all three periods, individuals were on the order of ten times more likely to marry within their clique than with members of the opposite clique.¹⁵ Though the two cliques were never entirely isolated from each other, there is no evidence of a trend towards greater integration. But the two cliques did differ from each other in one measure. Two-fifths (40 percent; $n = 133$) of intra-

small in size (often reconstructed from a single tomb epitaph); many of these are likely to be sub-branches of the 87 large patrilineal families included in the figures, but there is not yet sufficient evidence to confirm the genealogical link.

¹⁴One must also take into account the effect (described below) of a substantially greater number of surviving epitaphs for marriage-ban clans in the later period.

¹⁵See query JCH_note_15 in TBDB ver. 1.5. Specifically, in the period 600–700 CE, individual members of the marriage-ban and imperial-clan cliques were 10.5 times ($n=115$) more likely to marry within their own clique rather than with a member of the opposite clique. In the periods 700–760 CE and 780–880 CE, intra-clique marriages were 9.8 times ($n=129$) more likely and 11.7 times ($n=190$) more likely, respectively. These calculations exclude marriages involving members of patrilineal families that were within the marriage network but not obviously parts of either of the two cliques.

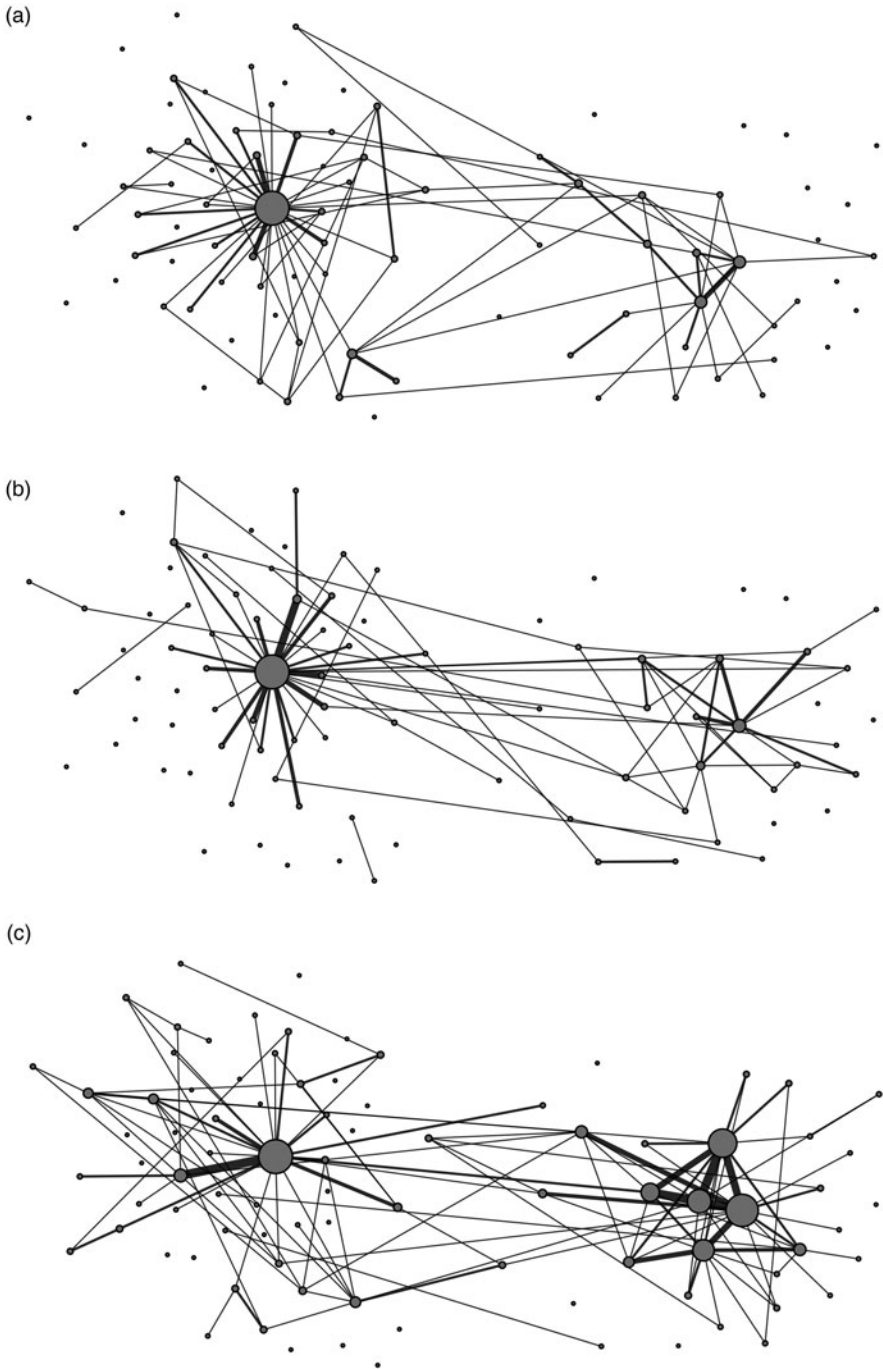


Figure 3. Evolution of Tang elite marriage network (600-880 CE) (a) 600-700 CE (b) 700-760 CE (c) 780-880 CE
Note: Uses same data and network layout as Figure 1, but showing only marriages between patriline estimated to have occurred in the defined period (based on the ages, or estimated ages, of the groom), and including edges representing even only a single known marriage. Node size is proportional to the sum of all marriages involving the patriline during the time period in question.

clique marriages within the marriage-ban clique involved two patrilineages that intermarried in all three time periods spanning the Tang, whereas such marriages were relatively less common (13 percent; $n = 136$) in the case of the imperial-clan clique.¹⁶ This latter clique evidently evolved more over time, as new families—such as the descendants of Guo Ziyi, hero in the fight against the An Lushan rebels—began to intermarry with the imperial clan over the course of the Tang Dynasty.¹⁷ By contrast, the marriage-ban clique consisted of an established marriage network with origins in the sixth-century or earlier.¹⁸

The Chief Ministers

In addition to using network analysis to analyze a marriage network of patrilineages, one can also treat individual patrilineages themselves as an empirically reconstructed network—roughly speaking a family tree—of people sharing certain common characteristics. One example of a shared characteristic involves the “home base” of a patrilineage, which—as used in Figure 1 and Table 1—is defined as the place where the family buried its dead.¹⁹ Given the desirability to bury kin together, one can surmise the home base of most individual members of a patrilineage in a particular period of time based on the discovery of only a small number of family epitaphs.²⁰ A second example involves marriage ties. Though one usually does not know the marriage partner of a given individual, one can—as we have seen—get a sense of a patrilineage’s pattern of marriage alliances based on the sample of known marriages. On this basis, one can surmise with what type of family an individual kinsman is likely to have intermarried. In sum, reconstructing patrilineal kinship networks helps one to fill in inevitable gaps in the historical record.

Here I will apply a network-based approach to investigate the evolution in the composition of chief ministers during the Tang period. The 364 men from 246 different patrilineages known to have served as chief minister at some point in the Tang constitute a useful sample of political elites. The list of chief ministers is probably comprehensive, so one need not worry excessively about biases regarding whose name survives.²¹ In addition, as a result of the hard work of eleventh-century genealogists, the families

¹⁶See query *JCH_note_16* in TBDB ver. 1.5. By contrast, the discrepancy between the two cliques is less evident if one considers a somewhat shorter span of time: 72 percent of marriage-ban intra-clique marriages and 64 percent of imperial-clan intra-clique marriages involved two patrilineages that intermarried with each other across at least two periods of time.

¹⁷In Figure 3c, Guo Ziyi’s patrilineage appears as the node with the greatest number of documented marriage ties to the large node representing the imperial clan. All known marriages between Guo’s patrilineage and the imperial clan date to the period after 760 CE.

¹⁸For examples of intermarriages between the “eastern” branch of the Zhaojun Lis and the “second” and the “great” branches of the Boling Cuis dating to the sixth century; see Tackett, *Destruction*, 145n83.

¹⁹On why a Chinese elite family’s “primary geographic attachment” was near the family cemetery, see Beverly J. Bossler, *Powerful Relations: Kinship, Status, and the State in Sung China, 960–1279* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, 1998), 42–43. Empirical evidence suggests family members indeed spent most of their time at the place of family burial. See Tackett, *Destruction*, 73–82.

²⁰As a consequence of the strong desirability to bury family members together, when one finds multiple epitaphs for members of a single large patrilineage, it is common to find multiple sub-branches of the patrilineage buried in the same general region. My sense is that, unless a burial is said explicitly to be “temporary” (權), a single epitaph indicates the likely site of burial of the entire patrilineage in the period of time in question. For an in-depth discussion of this point with concrete examples, see Tackett, *Destruction*, 113–18.

²¹There are also relatively comprehensive lists of the heads of certain ministries, as well as of prefects of the most important prefectures. These, too, would constitute interesting samples for analysis.

Table 1. Family background of Tang chief ministers

Period	Patriline office-holding background		Patriline home base			Network membership			n
	pre-Tang	pre-Sui	capital	provinces	unknown	marriage net	marriage-ban clique	imperial clan clique	
618–700 CE	87%	81%	71%	3%	27%	67%	6%	28%	221
701–760 CE	78%	70%	76%	4%	20%	76%	16%	24%	147
761–820 CE	77%	65%	82%	3%	16%	77%	26%	22%	77
821–880 CE	70%	68%	75%	1%	24%	82%	24%	25%	87

Note: All percentages calculated based on a count of tenures in office. Patriline home base is the place where a substantial majority (at least 78 percent) of kinsmen or unmarried kinswomen were buried according to extant epitaphs. “Capital” indicates Chang’an, Luoyang, or the Capital Corridor between the two capitals; “provinces” indicates anywhere else. “Marriage net” refers to patriline belonging to the entire marriage network, including leaves and small branches eliminated from [Figures 1–3](#). “Marriage-ban clique” refers to 41 patriline at the core of the marriage-ban clique; “imperial clan clique” refers to 66 patriline at the core of that clique.
Data source: *JCH_table1* in TBDB ver. 1.5.

of chief ministers are relatively easy to reconstruct using the tables contained in the *New Tang History*. Finally, it is important to bear in mind that about half of the 246 families of chief ministers supplied only a single chief minister during the entire course of the dynasty. Yet, at the same time, each of these families had an average of about forty-eight documented Tang-era officeholders (a number that will likely increase as new epitaphs are excavated), including men who served in a broad range of different offices.²² Thus, one can think of the patriline of chief ministers as representing a broad cross-section of the Tang political elite. Undoubtedly, there were many other very similar families that, due to the vagaries of court politics, never themselves produced a chief minister.

Tables 1 and 2 tabulate data concerning chief ministers divided into four sixty-year periods spanning the Tang Dynasty. The figures are in terms of percentages of tenures in office.²³ In many ways, the pool of chief ministers changed very little over the course of the dynasty, corroborating an observation made long ago by David Johnson.²⁴ Whereas Johnson focused specifically on the “great clan” origins of these men, the two tables presented here suggest continuities in terms of a somewhat different set of metrics. In the case of a substantial majority of chief ministers from all four periods, it is possible to trace their ancestries back to officeholders serving prior to the founding of the Tang, or even prior to the founding of the Sui. The apparent decline in percentages over time (from 87 percent to 70 percent and from 81 percent to 68 percent respectively) is probably attributable in large part to the increased difficulty of tracing genealogies over an ever greater number of generations. In addition, throughout the dynasty, a substantial majority of chief ministers came from patriline known to have been based in the capital region, with only a tiny percentage in the earlier periods from provincially based patriline.²⁵ Indeed, as we shall see below, very few provincial epitaphs have been discovered for such politically powerful families. Finally, most chief ministers in all time periods came from families with ties to the marriage network described above. It is plausible that all of these long-term continuities in the Tang political elite will become even more evident in the future as more data from excavated epitaphs becomes available, permitting more comprehensive reconstructions of kin and marriage ties.

Aside from these continuities in the characteristics of chief ministers, two long-term changes stand out in Table 1. First, the Luoyang-based marriage-ban clique provided relatively few chief ministers at the beginning of the dynasty, perhaps a consequence of the early Tang emperors’ animosity towards the marriage-ban clans. By the late eighth century, however, this clique had become as important as the clique surrounding the imperial clan. This trend corroborates an argument made previously by Maeda Aiko regarding the resurgence of the marriage-ban clans as a consequence of the rule of Empress Wu.²⁶ Second, patriline whose ancestors had served the Southern Dynasties in pre-Tang times became increasingly insignificant as sources of chief

²²Moreover, about 65 percent of these families had ten or more known officeholders. See query JCH_note_22 in TBDB ver. 1.5.

²³That is, chief ministers serving more than one tenure in office will appear more than once in the tabulation. Focusing on tenures in office permits one to focus on the moment of selection of chief ministers. One could also tabulate the figures in terms of service years, which produces roughly similar results (data not shown).

²⁴Johnson, *Medieval Chinese Oligarchy*, 131–44.

²⁵The remaining 20–30 percent were from patriline for whom there is as of yet insufficient data to ascertain their home bases.

²⁶Maeda Aiko 前田愛子, “Jotei Bu Sokuten to Tōdai kizoku: Santō gosei o chūshin to shite” 女帝武則天と唐代貴族: 山東五姓を中心として, in *Nishijima Sadao Hakushi tsuitō ronbunshū: Higashi Ajia shi*

Table 2. Ancestral pre-Tang regional regime affiliations of Tang chief ministers (if known)

Period	Northwestern (W. Wei and N. Zhou)	Northeastern (E. Wei and N. Qi)	Northern (i.e. NW and/or NE)	Southern (S. Liang and Chen)	n
618–700 CE	34%	35%	73%	27%	165
701–760 CE	46%	22%	83%	17%	98
761–820 CE	26%	49%	83%	15%	47
821–880 CE	42%	42%	91%	9%	55

Note: All percentages calculated based on a count of tenures in office. Figures only include chief ministers whose ancestral pre-Tang regional regime affiliation is known. “Northern” combines “northwestern” and “northeastern” patriline, as well as patriline serving pre-Tang regimes in both the northwest and the northeast. *Data source:* *JCH_table2* in TBDB ver. 1.5.

ministers. The possible significance of these two developments will be examined in the Conclusion.

Although the data suggests that chief ministers throughout the dynasty were overwhelmingly from capital-based patriline, the home base of a patriline was determined here based on aggregate burial data from the entire dynasty. Such a methodology does not take into consideration when a patriline first established itself in the capital. Previous scholarship has roughly dated the relocation to the capital of the most powerful families to the first half of the dynasty.²⁷ A more precise understanding of the timing of the relocation is important for understanding the evolution of the geography of political power during the Tang, and, more specifically, for determining to what extent the capital elite had a stranglehold on the upper echelons of the bureaucracy as early as the seventh century. Figure 4 charts the change in the difference between the start of a chief minister’s tenure in office and the earliest known capital burial of a member of the chief minister’s patriline. A negative number indicates that the start of the minister’s tenure preceded the earliest known burial; a positive number indicates that it came after the earliest capital burial. The upward trend (from left to right) in the figure indicates that, by the eighth century, chief ministers were increasingly frequently from patriline well established in the capital at the time of their elevation to the top office.

It is tempting to conclude from the trendline, especially given its slope of roughly 1:1, that the late seventh century—that is, between where the trend line and data line cross the x-axis and roughly representing the time of Empress Wu’s reign—was a key moment when many patriline relocated from elsewhere to the capital. But we should be careful not to draw such a conclusion prematurely. A smaller number of epitaphs relatively speaking have been discovered dating to the first half of the seventh century.²⁸ Moreover, as noted below, epitaphs prior to the eighth century tend to identify only one or two generations of ancestors.²⁹ The result is that kinswomen and kinsmen of chief

no tenkai to Nihon 西嶋定生博士追悼論文集: 東アジア史の展開と日本 (Tokyo: Yamakawa, 2000), 309–36.

²⁷Johnson, “Last Years of a Great Clan,” 32–40; Ebrey, *Aristocratic Families*, 91–93; Mao Hanguang, “Cong shizu jiguan qianyi kan Tangdai shizu.”

²⁸Tackett, *Destruction*, 226 (Figure 5.4).

²⁹In addition, early Tang epitaphs are inconsistent in how they identify ancestors. Often they shorten a two-character given name into a single character, or they refer to the ancestor by his style (字) rather than his given name (諱), or, in some cases, even by a combination of the given name and style. As a result, it is

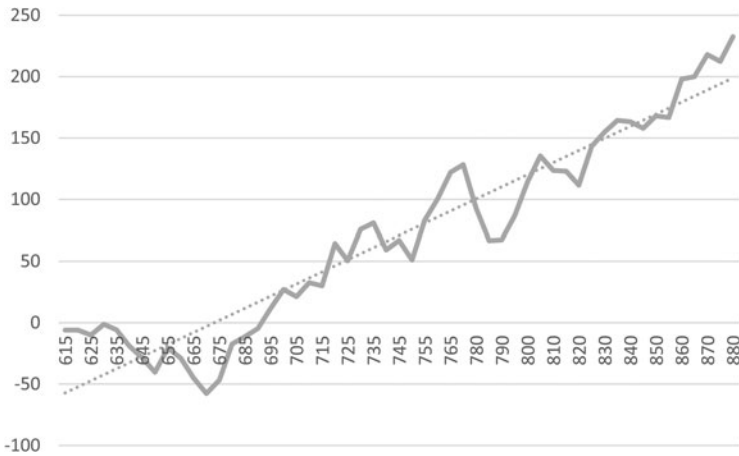


Figure 4. Difference in years between start of chief minister's tenure in office and date of first documented capital burial of a kinsman

Note: X-axis indicates year of start of tenure; starts of tenure are calculated in five-year periods (such that the first two years of the dynasty, 618 and 619, are tabulated under the year 615) as a rolling average; y-axis indicates difference between start of tenure and date of first burial in the capital. A negative value on the y-axis indicates the start of the chief minister's tenure came before the earliest known burial of a kinsman (or unmarried kinswoman); a positive value indicates it followed it.

Data source: *JCH_Figure4_without_rolling_avg* in TBDB ver. 1.5, with the rolling average then calculated using an Excel spreadsheet.

ministers, as well as descendants of the great families, are somewhat more difficult to identify in seventh-century epitaphs. It is perhaps telling that, as of yet, the only epitaphs that I have encountered demonstrating earlier provincial burials of members of capital-based chief minister patriline date to the 620s or earlier.³⁰ It is plausible that epitaphs excavated in the future will reveal that nearly all “capital-based” patriline in Table 1, even those of seventh-century chief ministers, were well established in the capital many years before the respective chief minister's tenure in office.

Cross-Sections of the Capital Elite

A third way to assess the evolution of the Tang elite is to take cross-sections of it during different periods of time, tabulating the composition of each cross-section based on a comprehensive survey of excavated epitaphs. Here, I focus on epitaphs from the two capital cities of Chang'an and Luoyang that date to three time periods: 650–660, 720–730, and 800–810. These particular time slices allow one to assess the social landscape at the capitals both pre- and post-Empress Wu, as well as pre- and post-An Lushan. Unlike the survey of chief ministers, this survey looks well beyond the pinnacle

easy to miss genealogical ties that exist between individuals mentioned in epitaphs and the patriline reconstructed in a database.

³⁰Most of these are listed in Tackett, *Destruction*, 45n49. By the ninth century, outside of the Capital Corridor, the epitaph record leaves few traces of individuals still based in the prefectures designated by their choronyms, except in the case of the Lower Yangzi, where one still found a population of non-officeholding elites claiming the locale as their place of family origin. See Tackett, *Destruction*, 44–61.

of the political elite. Indeed, not all epitaphs were composed for officeholders. Elsewhere, I have argued that a survey of excavated epitaphs from a single region provides a relatively representative sample of the *economic* elite based there.³¹ At the capital, the economic elite largely overlapped with the political elite, but it did not do so entirely.

Table 3 presents data on the careers of the deceased individuals and of their immediate family members, as well as on the broader kin and marriage network to which the deceased belonged. The table begins by tabulating the “officeholding tradition,” a measure of the share of close relatives of the deceased who held office. A “strong” tradition indicates that most generations (including those of the grandfather, father, deceased or deceased’s spouse, and deceased’s children) held office. “None” indicates there are no known officeholders among the deceased’s close relatives—that is, that the deceased in essence did not belong to the political elite no matter how it is defined. The table then identifies the “elite type” of the deceased (or that of her husband or father in the case of a woman, or that of the father in the case of a child under the age of 21). Elite types include: “no office”; “civil” for civil bureaucrats; “military” for military men; “dynastic” for imperial princes and princesses, the consorts of princes and princesses, palace women, and eunuchs; and “religious” for monks, nuns, and priests. Perhaps the most important conclusion to draw from this data is that, whereas the Chang’an elite remained relatively stable in terms of its composition throughout the dynasty, the Luoyang elite changed considerably, especially between the 650s and the 720s. In the early Tang, less than half of Luoyang epitaphs were for individuals from families with strong officeholding traditions, whereas three-quarters to four-fifths were from such families in the 720s and 800s.³² In addition, over two-fifths (43 percent) of epitaphs from the early period were for individuals who did not themselves hold office (or whose husbands or fathers did not hold office in the case of women and children), whereas the figure drops to 5 percent in the 720s and 12 percent in the early 800s.³³ Simply put, the Luoyang elite had fewer ties to the state in the first decades of the Tang dynasty than it would in later times. Finally, one can look at the kin and marriage networks to which the individuals belonged. Here, too, one notes less change over time among the Chang’an elite. The Luoyang elite, by comparison, evolved considerably. Only a tiny percentage had demonstrable ties to the political elite marriage network in the early Tang, whereas a clear majority did so by the ninth century. In addition, the forty-one patriline belonging to the marriage-ban clique came to occupy a disproportionate position in Luoyang society by the late Tang, whereas their presence was barely measurable in the 650s.

Table 4 examines a different set of data during the same slices of time. It focuses on the “choronyms” attributed in an epitaph to the deceased and to affines of the deceased (usually the spouse or sons-in-law). The “choronym” was a pre-Tang prefecture name that a great family claimed as its ancestral place of origin. By early Tang times,

³¹Tackett, *Destruction*, 16–25.

³²The dip between the 720s and 800s may in part be a consequence of the sample size. Looking at the entire period between 800 and 880 (by resurrecting data I employed in a previous study), one finds 82 percent (rather than 76 percent) of epitaphs are for individuals from families with strong officeholding traditions.

³³The resurgence between the 720s and early 800s may be misleading (see previous note). Looking at the entire period between 800 and 880, the figure for no family tradition of officeholding is 4 percent rather than 7 percent, and the figure for office type = “none” is 9 percent rather than 12 percent.

Table 3. Cross-section of capital elite in three time periods

	650–660		720–730		800–810	
	Chang'an	Luoyang	Chang'an	Luoyang	Chang'an	Luoyang
Officeholding tradition						
Strong	74%	45%	79%	80%	80%	76%
None	3%	12%	0	2%	2%	7%
n	100	174	116	174	99	140
Office type						
None	12%	43%	5%	5%	6%	12%
Civil	52%	39%	55%	80%	57%	73%
Military	28%	18%	27%	13%	19%	14%
Dynastic	6%	1%	4%	1%	9%	0
Religious	1%	0	4%	2%	8%	2%
n	93	164	113	165	99	139
Network membership and patriline type						
Marriage network	39%	6%	50%	36%	42%	57%
Marriage-ban clique	1%	2%	3%	13%	3%	20%
Imperial clan clique	19%	2%	20%	9%	25%	7%
Marriage-ban clan	2%	2%	5%	16%	4%	20%
Chief minister clans	21%	5%	32%	29%	25%	31%
n	96	173	114	171	99	138

Note: “Elite” defined here as the class of people typically buried with an epitaph (i.e. it is a socioeconomic and not a political elite). Data based on all extant epitaphs from Chang’an and Luoyang dating to three time periods. Due to their abundance, in the case of Luoyang epitaphs from the 660s and 720s, only epitaphs dating to 650–655 and 720–725, respectively, were counted. A “strong” officeholding tradition means there were officeholders in three of four recent generations (grandfather, father, deceased’s generation, children); “none” means that there is no evidence of any officeholders in four recent generations. “Office type” determined based on deceased’s titles as identified in the epitaph (or based on husband or father’s titles in case of women, or on father’s titles in case of males under the age of 21). “None” means deceased apparently held no state or religious offices; “dynastic” refers to imperial princes, palace women, and eunuchs. On “marriage net,” “marriage-ban clique,” and “imperial clan clique,” see notes to [Table 1](#). “Marriage-ban clan” refers to specific patrilineal ties with demonstrable genealogical ties to one of the seven “marriage-ban” clans; these should be distinguished from the “marriage-ban clique,” which was composed primarily, but not exclusively, of some sub-branches of these clans.

Data source: *_JCH_table3_pt1*, *_JCH_table3_pt2*, and *_JCH_table3_pt3* in TBDB ver. 1.5.

prefectures had all been renamed, such that choronyms became anachronistic place names usually easily distinguishable from other toponyms. Customarily, members of a great family preceded their surname with a choronym in order to establish the distinction of their ancestry. For the historian, the principle drawback of relying upon choronyms (and the reason I have preferred to focus on empirically reconstructed patriline) is that prestigious choronyms were easily concocted (either by the deceased's family or the author of the epitaph), albeit fictive claims were probably more rampant in the provinces than at the capital. Nevertheless, a study of choronyms does offer an additional perspective on the composition of the political elite, because it involves an alternative sample of individuals—namely marriage partners and other affines mentioned in an epitaph by choronym and surname but whose patriline cannot be conclusively identified.³⁴ In addition, analyzing choronym use—especially the contexts in which choronyms were invoked—sheds light on strategies used by elites to maintain their social distinction within society.

The first four rows of Table 4 tabulate the frequency of claims to choronyms located in four regions: the northeast (defined as lying north of 33°N latitude and east of 113°E longitude, corresponding to Hebei and eastern Hedong and Henan); the northwest (north of 33°N latitude and west of 108°E longitude, corresponding to western Shaanxi, as well as the Gansu Corridor); the south (south of 33°N latitude, i.e. roughly speaking south of the Huai River); and Hebei (a sub-region of the northeast). It should be evident that clans claiming northeastern, northwestern, or southern choronyms were not necessarily affiliated with the pre-Sui regimes based in the northeast, northwest, and south, respectively, though many were. The data suggests that claims to northwestern choronyms (like Longxi) remained stable throughout the dynasty, whereas there was a decline in the use of southern choronyms, probably reflecting the decline in political significance of southern families, a trend alluded to above. There was also a substantial surge in the use of northeastern choronyms, largely attributable to the greater numbers of claims to Hebei ones, including notably those used by marriage-ban clans, such as Qinghe, Boling, and Zhaojun. Indeed, among claims to specific choronym-surname combinations, one sees a marked increase in references to the marriage-ban clans in particular (row 5 of Table 4).

The next three rows of the table refer to two Tang-era lists of great clans found in manuscript form among the Dunhuang documents. These lists, well known to historians, appear to identify the most famous surnames from each prefecture.³⁵ One sees a steady rise over the course of the dynasty in claims to choronym-surname combinations that appear on these lists. If one takes into consideration other reconstructed lists of Tang great clans that attempt to fill in the gaps in the manuscript lists (row 9 of the table), one finds a sharp decline in claims of descent from unrecognized clans. A plausible explanation is that these trends reflect a heightened awareness among epitaph authors of which choronym-surname combinations were most prestigious and most worthy of recording. The last two rows of the table are also suggestive of a greater interest over time in an individual's officeholding relatives. Whereas in the mid-seventh century, the typical Chang'an and Luoyang epitaph identified only two immediate

³⁴For instance, it is common for an epitaph to identify a man's spouse as, say, Ms. Li of Zhaojun. One knows the surname of the deceased's spouse (Li) and her choronym (Zhaojun), but nothing telling us who her father was or which patriline she belonged to.

³⁵For more on these lists, see Johnson, *Medieval Chinese Oligarchy*, 62–70; Tackett, *Destruction*, esp. 31–35; as well as the footnotes therein.

Table 4. Classification of clans of deceased and deceased’s affines in three time periods

		650–660		720–730		800–810	
		Chang’an	Luoyang	Chang’an	Luoyang	Chang’an	Luoyang
–		Clan classification					
1	Northeastern choronyms	21%	30%	32%	50%	43%	53%
2	Northwestern choronyms	14%	15%	19%	11%	20%	15%
3	Southern choronyms	10%	16%	8%	11%	4%	5%
4	Hebei choronyms	9%	12%	16%	31%	23%	29%
5	Marriage-ban clans	16%	15%	21%	32%	26%	42%
6	On list A	25%	35%	23%	44%	34%	41%
7	On list C	60%	52%	64%	76%	77%	80%
8	On list A or C	66%	65%	68%	81%	80%	84%
9	Not on any clan list	27%	33%	13%	12%	7%	6%
n		77	141	121	206	136	245
		Epitaph characteristics					
10	# of ancestors identified	2.04	1.93	2.64	2.51	2.66	2.43
11	Choronym in epitaph title	10%	2%	21%	18%	45%	49%
n		92	174	112	165	97	135

Note: Data based on all extant epitaphs from Chang’an and Luoyang dating to three time periods. Due to their abundance, in the case of Luoyang epitaphs from the 660s and 720s, only epitaphs dating to 650–655 and 720–725, respectively, were counted. Rows 1–9 classify the clans of the deceased and of affines identified in epitaphs, including only clans for which both the surname and the choronym are known. “Northeastern choronyms” are choronyms referring to prefectures lying north of 33°N latitude and east of 113°E longitude; “northwestern choronyms” lie north of 33°N latitude and west of 108°E longitude; “southern choronyms” lie south of 33°N latitude. Lists “A” and “C” refer to the Dunhuang lists described in Johnson, *Medieval Chinese Oligarchy*, 62–70; “not on any clan list” takes into consideration all lists mentioned by Johnson, as well as an additional list of 44 clans appearing in Tackett, *Destruction*, 34. Because a single epitaph might identify zero or several affines and may or may not identify the choronym of the deceased, n for rows 1–9 does not equal the number of epitaphs examined. Rows 10–11, by contrast, include one data point per epitaph. “# of ancestors identified” refers to the number of immediate ancestors identified by name in the epitaph; “choronym in epitaph title” counts epitaphs in which the choronym appears in the title line of the epitaph, and excludes choronyms that appear less prominently within the epitaph, for instance as the place of ancestral origin of the deceased.

Data source: `_JCH_table4_pt1` and `_JCH_table4_pt2` in TBDB ver. 1.5.

ancestors, it was common by the 720s to identify three immediate ancestors—usually the great grandfather, grandfather, and father (see row 10). This trend coincided with a greater tendency in epitaphs to identify the deceased's officeholding maternal grandfather or father-in-law (data not shown), reflecting the importance of good marriages as well as patrilineal ancestry in defining the worth of an individual. Finally, row 11 of the table calculates the frequency with which choronyms precede the surname of the deceased in the title of the epitaph, a measure of the choronym's prominence within the text of the epitaph.³⁶ Taken together, I propose that the data in rows 6 to 11 point to a growing sense among scions of the most famous families that it was necessary to reassert explicitly the prestige of the family.

Provincial Elites and Imperial Power

What repercussions did the aforementioned developments have on provincial elites? In this final section, I shift focus from what we can learn about the structure of the Tang elite from capital epitaphs to what we can learn from provincial ones. The sample consulted for the discussion that follows consists of most published Sui-Tang-era epitaphs from regions of north China beyond the Capital Corridor, excluding the prefecture of Luzhou.³⁷ It is beyond the scope of this brief survey to examine regional differences between the provinces, so I treat this sample of 800 or so inscriptions as representing a generalized cross-section of the empire's provincial elite.³⁸ In terms of temporal distribution, one notes an important lull in epitaph production in the 620s through 650s (Figure 5). Unfortunately, this means that, although one can discern much about the Sui Period and the period accompanying the rise of Empress Wu, one has far less data on the decades immediately following the Tang founding.

What can we learn from this sample of epitaphs? One of the most important trends transforming provincial elite society of the Sui and Tang involved declining ties between the provinces and the center of imperial power. The diminished political importance of provincials can be measured using a variety of different metrics. One can see it in the ever smaller fraction of epitaphs composed for members of the high imperial elite—that is, individuals with immediate family members serving in high-ranking positions in the

³⁶By contrast, row 11 does not count choronyms that appear less prominently in the epitaph, for example as the place of ancestral origin of the deceased.

³⁷Given the overabundance of extant Luzhou epitaphs, I decided to exclude them from this brief survey. For detailed studies of this corpus, see Man Xu, "China's Local Elites in Transition: Seventh- to Twelfth-Century Epitaphs Excavated in Luzhou," *Asia Major* 3rd ser., 30.1 (2017), 59–107; Man Xu, "Ancestors, Spouses, and Descendants: The Transformation of Epitaph Writing in Song Luzhou," *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 46 (2016), 119–68. Regarding the south, the overwhelming majority of southern epitaphs date to the late eighth century or later. See Tackett, "Elite in the Sui and T'ang," n. 78. As a consequence, southern epitaphs are not helpful for tracing trends over time—except insofar as their relatively late emergence may provide circumstantial evidence for the rapid accumulation of private wealth in the post-An Lushan south.

³⁸It is also worth noting that many regions of north China produced too few epitaphs to produce statistically significant results. Examining trends throughout all of north China guarantees a sufficiently large sample size. Historians interested in the Sui-Tang provinces may in the future wish to pay particular attention to the unique characteristics of frontier prefectures (numerous epitaphs survive from both Xiazhou and Yunzhou); the Hebei autonomous provinces, especially Youzhou, which was unique in numerous ways; the Zhaoyi-Weibo region (which would include the corpus of Luzhou epitaphs); other provinces with important military forces (e.g., a number of epitaphs from Pinglu Province survive); as well as the Lower Yangzi and Northern Zhejiang.

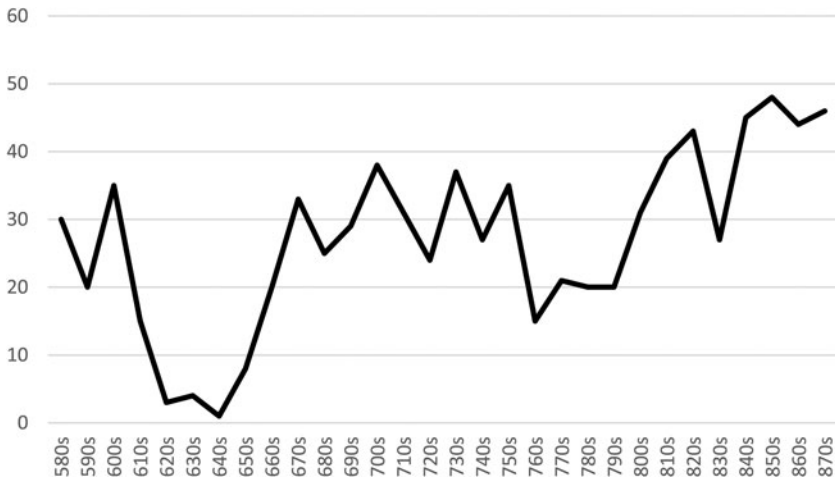


Figure 5. Total number of epitaphs in provincial sample (by decade)

Note: Sample includes most published epitaphs dating to the period 581 to 880 from Henan, Hebei, Hedong, and Guannei, excluding the Capital Corridor and the prefecture of Luzhou. Published sources include Wang Qiyi and Zhou Xiaowei, eds., *Suidai muzhiming huikao*; Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, *Tangdai muzhi huibian*; Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, *Tangdai muzhi huibian xuji*, 1075–1076; Wu Gang, ed., *Quan Tang wen buyi*, vols. 1–9; Tian Guofu 田國福, ed., *Hejian jinshi yilu* 河間金石遺錄 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu, 2008); *Hengshui chutu muzhi* 衡水出土墓誌 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei meishu, 2010); *Anyang muzhi xuanbian* 安陽墓誌選編 (Beijing: Kexue, 2015); Han Mingxiang 韓明祥, ed., *Jinan lidai muzhiming* 濟南歷代墓誌銘 (Jinan: Huanghe, 2002); Fan Yingmin 樊英民, ed., *Yanzhou lidai beike lu kao* 兗州歷代碑刻錄考 (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 2013); *Shandong shike fenlei quanji* 山東石刻分類全集 (Qingdao: Qingdao, 2013), vol. 5; Li Hengfa 李恒法, ed., *Jining lidai muzhi kao* 濟寧歷代墓誌考 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui, 2014); Yin Xian 殷憲, ed., *Datong xinchu Tang Liao Jin Yuan zhishi xinjie* 大同新出唐遼金元誌石新解 (Taiyuan: San Jin, 2012); relevant volumes of the series *Xin Zhongguo chutu muzhi* 新中國出土墓誌 and *San Jin shike daquan* 三晉石刻大全; and recent issues of the major archaeological and calligraphy journals.

Data source: *JCH_Figure5* in TBDB ver. 1.5.

civil bureaucracy—as well as the increased fraction of epitaphs composed for individuals with no officeholders in their immediate family (Table 5). The sharpest drop came sometime after the founding of the Tang. It is conceivable that there would have been a further decline in ties to officialdom in the post-An Lushan period had the provincial governments not become major employers of provincial elites (as we shall see below).³⁹ Of course, “non-officeholders” were not necessarily individuals with no connections to the state. Some undoubtedly served in the army—but without holding an office—or they assisted the local administration as a sort of liaison to local society.⁴⁰ Such men

³⁹Not reflected in Figure 4 is a surge in the post-An Lushan period of epitaphs from provinces with major provincial governments—namely the provinces of Youzhou 幽州, Hedong 河東, Chengde 成德, Yiwu 義武, Pinglu 平盧, and Yichang 義昌—undoubtedly reflecting the important impact of provincial governments on mid- to late-Tang provincial society. Epitaphs from these six provinces account for 29 percent of provincial epitaphs up through the 750s, then 62 percent of provincial epitaphs in subsequent decades.

⁴⁰For example, based on their epitaphs, the provincials Cheng Junxin 成君信 (812–878), Wang De 王德 (779–856), Li Yuanshun 李元順 (810–867), and Guo Fan 郭璠 (799–872) all appear to have served in the military without holding an identifiable office; and Wang Shang 王尚 (ca. 669–ca. 753) contributed only informally to local governance (receiving an honorary title late in life in recognition of his advanced age). See Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, *Tangdai muzhi huibian*, 2491; Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao,

Table 5. Family officeholding traditions of provincial vs. capital elites (by period)

	Provincial elites			Capital elites		
	Families with high officials	Non-officeholding families	n	Families with high officials	Non-officeholding families	n
581–600	48%	4%	48			
600–649	33%	4%	54			
650–699	4%	21%	114	28%	12%	267
700–749	3%	37%	153	43%	2%	281
750–799	6%	30%	94			
800–849	4%	27%	165	37%	5%	227
850–880	3%	33%	141			

Note: Data culled from sample of provincial epitaphs depicted in Figure 5, plus cross-section of capital epitaphs defined in Table 3. Families analyzed based on officeholding of the deceased (or husband of the deceased), the deceased’s brothers, the deceased’s sons, and the father and grandfather of the deceased (and of the husband of the deceased). “High officials” are defined as central government bureaucrats of rank 5 or higher, the magistrates of the metropolitan counties (Wannian, Chang’an, Henan, Luoyang, Taiyuan, Jinyang, and Fengxian), as well as top prefectural officials (prefects (刺史), vice prefects (司馬), chief administrators (長史), and administrative aides (別駕)) whose place of office was not in their province of burial (i.e., prefects, etc. serving in the Hebei autonomous provinces generally did not count as “high officials”). “Non-officeholding families” were families in which no members (as defined above) held office. Non-officeholders included men whose only identified official title was a merit title (勳官) or a posthumous title (贈官), i.e. titles granted as rewards that did not confer actual political clout. Also included were office eligible individuals who did not secure an office, including exam graduates, and holders of civilian prestige titles below rank 5. By contrast, men whose only identified official title is a military prestige title, a civil prestige title of rank 5 or higher, or one of the many honorary titles prefixed with *jianjiao* (檢校) or *shi* (試) are all assumed to have concurrently held a substantive office. For more on merit/prestige titles and officeholding, see notes 41–42. Data source: *_JCH_table5_pt1* and *_JCH_table5_pt2* in TBDB ver. 1.5.

appear to have sometimes received honorary titles from the state in compensation for their contributions, titles that did not confer any political authority.⁴¹ There were also individuals eligible for service, who may have sought office, but who were never assigned a substantive post.⁴² And then there were those who received special titles granted to elderly members of the local elite who had reached the age of 80.⁴³ Such connections to the state among non-officeholders does much to suggest the hegemony of imperial power in local society. But one should not assume these non-officeholders held sway beyond their own local society; they had nowhere near the political clout of the capital-based bureaucratic elite.

Diminishing provincial ties to the highest echelons of political power can also be measured on the basis of the fraction of epitaphs composed for scions of prominent pre-Sui families (defined here as individuals whose ancestors had biographies in the dynastic histories of the Northern and Southern Dynasties), as well as members of

Tangdai muzhi huibian xuji, 1075–76; Chen Shangjun 陳尚君, *Quan Tang wen bubian* 全唐文補編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 1900; Fan Yingmin 樊英民, ed., *Yanzhou lidai beike lu kao* 兗州歷代碑刻錄考 (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 2013), 38–40; Miao Yuanlong 苗元隆, ed., *San Jin shike daquan* 三晉石刻大全: *Taiyuan shi Jiancaoping qu juan* 太原市尖草坪區卷 (Taiyuan: San Jin, 2012), 315–16.

⁴¹For example, Wang Quan 王詮 (583–668), buried in Xiazhou 夏州 on the northern frontier, had been sent to the far south to fight the “southern barbarians” 南蠻, after which “in recompense for his service to his country, he was awarded by special decree the [merit title of] Commandant of Courageous Guards” 報國酬庸, 蒙授驍騎尉. But his epitaph mentions no substantive military offices. The epitaph of Yan Shen 閻神 (691–756) offers a similar example. See *Xin Zhongguo chutu muzhi: Shaanxi* (3) 新中國出土墓誌: 陝西 (叁) (Beijing: Wenwu, 2016), 下: 19; Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, *Tangdai muzhi huibian xuji*, 670. As a general rule, I treat men whose only identifiable official title was a merit title to be non-officeholders. The epitaph of Wang Xuandu 王玄度 (625–695) makes abundantly clear that he “never craved rank and wealth [i.e. an official salary], and never served a lord [i.e. the state]” (不貪榮祿不事王侯) despite holding the title of Supreme Pillar of State (上柱國). Other epitaphs—including those of Song Lü 宋履 (d. ca. 702) and Long Rui 龍叡 (656–741)—identify their subjects both as holders of merit titles and as “recluses” (處士), a common euphemism for a man who never served in office. See *Xin Zhongguo chutu muzhi: Shaanxi* (3) 下: 26; Sun Jimin 孫繼民 et al., eds., *Hebei xin faxian shike tiji yu Sui Tang shi yanjiu* 河北新發現石刻題記與隋唐史研究 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin, 2006), 290–92; Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, *Tangdai muzhi huibian xuji*, 578.

⁴²In the database, within the broad category of “office eligible,” I include exam graduates, tribute scholars (who were not yet technically “eligible”), and candidates for appointment by the civil or military bureaus of appointments (i.e., men identified as 吏部常選 or 兵部常選, respectively). I also include men whose only identifiable official title is a civil prestige title below rank 5, as I have found examples of such men who are explicitly said to have never held a substantive, salaried position. For the moment, I have been treating higher ranked civil prestige titles as well as military prestige titles as evidence of officeholding.

⁴³In Tang times, such special titles are often identified as “appointments by courtesy” (版授). The man Wang Shang of note 40 died at age 85, but not before “a decree appointed him by courtesy Magistrate of the present [i.e. Yangqu] County in honor of his advanced age” (有制版授本縣令寵耆壽矣). See Miao Yuanlong, *San Jin shike daquan: Taiyuan shi Jiancaoping qu juan*, 下: 315–316. Unfortunately, such honorary offices are often indistinguishable from substantive offices (a problem sometimes also affecting posthumous titles). In the case of Long Run 龍潤 (561–653), we know from his own epitaph that his highest-ranking substantive office involved a relatively modest position as administrator in a *fubing* garrison. Then, “in the twentieth year of the Zhenguan era [646], his age was lofty, having exceeded eighty; when the imperial carriage visited Jinyang [his home county], [the emperor] personally inquired about the elderly, and with an edict he was appointed by courtesy Prefect of Liaozhou” (貞觀廿年, 春秋廖廓, 已八十有餘, 駕幸晉陽, 親問耆老, 詔板授遼州刺史). In the epitaph of one of his sons, this final office is correctly identified as a courtesy appointment. But four epitaphs for later descendants identify him as Prefect of Liaozhou without revealing the post to be merely honorary. See Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, *Tangdai muzhi huibian xuji*, 75, 119, 132, 252–53, 332–33, 578.

the clans of Tang chief ministers, of clans belonging to the capital-based marriage network described above, and of the marriage-ban clans. As shown in Table 6, one recognizes a rapid decline in the provinces of such well-connected families after the founding of the Tang, though it remains unclear if it was the fall of the Sui or the rise of Empress Wu that made the greater impact.⁴⁴

How does one account for the exceptional cases of Tables 5 and 6? Who were the provincials who apparently enjoyed ties to the heights of imperial power? Among the fifteen ninth-century epitaphs for provincials participating in the capital-based marriage network, six involved Hebei governors or their close relatives, families known to have intermarried with the imperial clan. One finds, for example, epitaphs of one of the governors of the autonomous Hebei province of Chengde and of his daughter. The governor had married the granddaughter of Emperor Xianzong—in what was essentially a dynastic marriage meant to draw the governor back into the Tang fold.⁴⁵ Of the remaining nine cases (a group that included all three ninth-century family members of chief ministers represented in Table 6), the majority were probably individuals participating in a well-documented survival strategy involving outward migration from the capital. Facing difficulty surviving in the hypercompetitive environment at the capital, some scions of prominent political families took advantage of appointments in the provinces to obtain land and reestablish themselves in the provinces. In so doing, they were in a good position to remain important in local society, even if they rapidly lost the connections necessary to secure offices at the center for themselves and their descendants.⁴⁶ Thus, for example, there is the epitaph of Wei Xiang 魏湘 (804–854), who served in office in autonomous Weibo Province, where his father had also served. Though he was a direct sixth-generation descendant of the famous early Tang chief minister Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643), by the time of his father's generation, his branch of the family had already committed themselves to service in Weibo.⁴⁷ Men like Wei

⁴⁴Occasionally one hears of the impact of the Sui–Tang transition on provincial families. The epitaphs of Xue Shigan 薛世感 (626–675) and Ren Suiliang 任遂良 (d. 731) explicitly mention the hardships faced by the family at this time. The epitaphs of Ren Zhong 任忠 (646–698) and Meng Bin 孟賓 (706–753) mention fleeing home during the transition and establishing new roots elsewhere. See Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, *Tangdai muzhi huibian xujī*, 463, 491–92; *Xin Zhongguo chutu muzhi: Shaanxi* (3), 下: 35–36, 46–47.

⁴⁵The governor in question was Wang Yuankui 王元逵 (812–854). For his epitaph and the epitaph of his daughter, see Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, *Tangdai muzhi huibian*, 2324–25, 2432–33. The other provincials in question are Wang Shizhen 王士真 (759–809), an earlier Chengde governor unrelated to Yuankui, whose brother and son both married daughters of emperors; and Zhang Youming 張佑明 (788–840), Zhang Feng 張鋒 (808–840), and Feng's wife Ms. Shi 史氏 (821–847). The Zhang's were close relatives of the two governors who had controlled Yiwu Province from 782 to 810. For the epitaphs of these four individuals, see Feng Jinzhong 馮金忠 and Zhao Shengquan 趙生泉, “Hebei Zhengding chutu Tang Chengde jiedushi Wang Shizhen muzhi chutan” 河北正定出土唐成德節度使王士真墓誌初探, *Zhongguo guojia bowuguan guankan* 2013.5: 80–86; Zhu Xuewu 朱學武, “Hebei Laishui Tang mu qingli jianbao” 河北涞水唐墓清理簡報, *Wenwu chunqiu* 1997.2:21–24, 26; Zhou Shaoliang and Zhao Chao, *Tangdai muzhi huibian*, 2255–56, 2270–71.

⁴⁶Tackett, *Destruction*, 91–98, 105.

⁴⁷For Wei Xiang's epitaph, see Zhao Wencheng 趙文成 and Zhao Junping 趙君平, eds., *Qin Jin Yu xin-chu muzhi souyi* 秦晉豫新出墓誌蒐佚 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan, 2012), 4: 1021–22. Wei's father had ended his career as Chief Administrator of Bozhou, also in Weibo Province. The epitaph of Li Hong 李洪 appears to constitute a similar case. See *Xin Zhongguo chutu muzhi: Beijing (yi)* 新中國出土墓誌: 北京(一) 上:20, 下:13–14. Li was the grandson of Crown Prince Zhanghuai 章懷 (killed in Empress Wu's 684 purge), and he had married the daughter of an old Hedong family. All of his (at

Table 6. Family background of provincial elites (by period)

	Patrilines included in histories of N. & S. Dyn.	Chief minister patrilines	In marriage network	Marriage-ban clan	n
581–600	35%	10%	25%	12%	48
600–649	21%	21%	23%	13%	53
650–699	1%	1%	1%	1%	112
700–749	1%	3%	4%	1%	150
750–799	0%	1%	2%	0%	95
800–849	1%	1%	4%	0%	168
850–880	0%	2%	5%	0%	141

Note: “Patrilines included in histories of N. & S. Dyn.” refers to families with demonstrable genealogical ties to an individual with a biography in the dynastic history of one or more of the Northern and Southern Dynasties; it does not include individuals claiming a famous distant ancestor. “Chief minister patrilines” includes individuals with demonstrable genealogical ties to men included in the *New Tang History* tables of the families of chief ministers. On “marriage network,” see notes to [Table 1](#). “Marriage-ban clan” refers to specific patrilines with demonstrable genealogical ties to one of the seven “marriage-ban” clans.

Data source: *JCH_table6* in TBDB ver. 1.5.

Xiang, though they may appear to have maintained enduring ties to the high political elite, in fact represented families with rapidly dwindling connections to the capital and capital society.

A second major trend affecting Sui-Tang provincial elite society involved the impact of a new layer of regional administration established in the post-An Lushan Period, that of provincial governments. Whereas prefectures had constituted the highest level of regional government in the early Tang, provinces were established in the post-An Lushan Period that now played an oversight role over their subordinate prefectures and also oversaw regional armed forces. This province-level of administration—headed by a governor (usually *jiedushi* or *guanchashi*)—rapidly became a major employer of provincial elites ([Table 7](#)). As is now well known, provincial governments also employed capital elites, including ambitious men early in their careers. However, unlike provincials, capital elites took positions as upper-echelon civilian bureaucrats in the provincial governments, positions that, according to court directives, provided them with fast-track promotion opportunities into the regular bureaucracy. Many of these men were initially hired by the governor at the capital (i.e., selected from among the capital-based elite) even before he left for his tenure in office. Provincial elites by contrast—with the notable exception of those inhabiting the autonomous provinces in Hebei—took either military offices or lower-echelon civilian positions, positions that precluded any hope of rising to higher office.⁴⁸

A third major trend evident from the survey of provincial epitaphs accompanied the creation of provincial governments in the immediate post-An Lushan Period. In brief, provincial officeholders increasingly came to serve in their home locales ([Table 8](#)). In

least) twenty older brothers remained in prominent positions in the capital. But as the youngest of the bunch, he apparently decided at some point (probably during the immediate aftermath of the An Lushan Rebellion) to seek his fortune in “our fief” (我邦), i.e., autonomous Youzhou, where he served in a series of administrative positions. His son too would serve the Youzhou government.

⁴⁸Tackett, *Destruction*, 176–78.

Table 7. Office types of provincial officeholding elites

	Office type of deceased (or husband of deceased)					Office type of deceased and immediate relatives				
	Regular prov. bur.	Capital bur.	Fubing / 16 guards	Provincial gov.	n	Regular prov. bur.	Capital office	Fubing / 16 guards	Provincial gov.	n
581–600	64%	23%	0%	0%	56	69%	19%	3%	0%	194
600–649	45%	26%	5%	0%	38	63%	11%	5%	0%	196
650–699	51%	4%	19%	0%	47	57%	7%	18%	0%	180
700–749	29%	6%	41%	0%	51	45%	3%	28%	3%	199
750–799	37%	2%	31%	37%	62	40%	4%	14%	21%	256
800–849	25%	1%	7%	59%	108	30%	1%	6%	43%	273
850–880	27%	0%	3%	77%	64	25%	0%	3%	68%	153

Note: Incorporates data from provincial epitaph sample described above; non-officeholders excluded from calculations. Office types of elites are calculated using two different methods. Left columns count only the deceased or deceased’s husband; to increase the sample size, right columns include in addition the sons and brothers (of deceased), as well as the father, grandfather, and great grandfather (of deceased and husband), but excludes families with over 50 known members (so as to exclude capital-based relatives of provincial elites). “Regular provincial bureaucracy” refers to offices at the county or prefectural level; “capital bureaucracy” refers to central government administrative positions of any rank; “fubing/16 guards” refers to military and civilian officeholding positions in the fubing militias, the capital-based Sixteen Guards (十六衛府), as well as the Three Capital Guards (三衛), but excluding honorary appointments to Sixteen Guards, which became common by the second half of the eighth century; “provincial government” refers to military and civilian officeholding positions under provincial (*jiedushi*, *guanhashi*, etc.) control.

Data source: *JCH_table7_pt1* and *JCH_table7_pt2* in TBDB ver. 1.5.

Table 8. Local officeholding among provincial elites

Served locally		
581–600	23%	(n = 47)
600–649	30%	(n = 30)
650–699	13%	(n = 38)
700–749	15%	(n = 40)
750–799	52%	(n = 56)
800–849	81%	(n = 91)
850–880	95%	(n = 60)

Note: Based on provincial epitaph sample described above. Includes only epitaphs for which the deceased (or husband) is an officeholder. “Served locally” means deceased (or husband) served within the prefecture of burial prior to 750 and within the province of burial post-750.

Data source: *JCH_table8* in TBDB ver. 1.5.

earlier times, the majority of officeholders served in the regular provincial bureaucracy, or in offices in the *fubing* “militia” system—a system in which soldiers were rotated between the Sixteen Guards at the capital and provincial garrisons attached to one of the capital guards. These appointments seem to have adhered strictly to the law of avoidance, such that individuals traveled away from home to take up their posts. In the case of *fubing* appointments (particularly common among Hedong and Xiazhou elites), ordinary militia soldiers may have been locals, but epitaph data suggests that officers generally served away from home, either at an appointment at the capital or at a provincial garrison hundreds of kilometers away.⁴⁹ The establishment of provincial governments ushered in a radical departure from earlier practice. With the law of avoidance not enforced in provincial governments—which hired their staffs without direct central government involvement—new employment opportunities became available for locals to serve at home. Except in the autonomous provinces, upper-echelon civilian officials (including the governor himself) were typically outsiders, usually selected from among the capital-based elite, but the remainder of the staff consisted of men recruited locally.

Conclusion

This paper has sought via four mini-studies—on the capital-based marriage network of political elites, on the backgrounds of the chief ministers, on the composition of the capital elite during three time slices, and on the makeup of the provincial elite—to offer new insight on how the political elite evolved over the course of the Tang Dynasty. One conclusion one can draw from this analysis is that the political elite was marked as much by continuities over time as by discontinuities. Throughout the dynasty, one recognizes the same marriage network of politically influential patriline, patriline that had served in office generation after generation since before the founding of the dynasty. These patriline supplied most of the Tang chief ministers, and

⁴⁹A survey of 109 provincial garrison appointments mentioned in the sample of provincial epitaphs suggests that the median distance (between seat of prefecture of burial and seat of garrison, with distance calculated using the Haversine formula) was 324 km. By contrast, capital elites who were appointed to *fubing* garrisons went a median distance of 182 km away from home.

presumably the lion's share of other top officials. The network constituted a capital elite insofar as the families were almost all based in one of the two capital cities by no later than the late seventh century—even earlier than has often been assumed. Moreover, throughout the dynasty, the network was structured in a similar way, with two prominent marriage cliques at its core: one consisting primarily of the preeminent “marriage-ban” clans and one organized around the Tang imperial Li clan.

Much has been made of attempts by the Sui and early Tang to weaken the power of entrenched provincial families through institutional innovations. But one should not conclude, as many have in the past, that the medieval aristocratic families declined as a consequence. Quite to the contrary, it was precisely by diminishing their influence that institutional developments helped ensure that local elites (except those in the prefectures immediately adjacent to the capital) competed poorly for high office with their capital-based counterparts. Though they continued to serve in low-ranking offices, it was rare already by the mid-seventh century to find provincials serving in high-ranking offices at the capital. Meanwhile, scions of the old pre-Tang elite, now established in the capital cities, were able to benefit from their connections in the capital, and from what was in essence an alliance with the dynasty and the imperial clan. As it adapted to new circumstances through relocation to the capital, aristocratic families were strengthened rather than diminished by the institutional changes—and this to the very end of the dynasty.

The political divide separating the capital from the provinces was further accentuated after the An Lushan Rebellion as a consequence of the establishment of new provincial governments. In the first half of the dynasty, officeholders among local elites tended to serve away from home, in county- or prefectural-level positions all over the empire, or in an office in a *fubing* militia. In all appearance, official appointments adhered to the “law of avoidance,” which forbade men from serving near their home bases. The staffing of the new provincial governments fundamentally changed the situation. It did so not by opening up new avenues of upward mobility for locals, as has been previously argued, but rather by assigning them to offices near their home locales. It was as a consequence of this reorganization of the geography of political power that the provinces came to have a “colonial” relationship with the metropolitan center. By the ninth century, agents of the center were dispatched from the capital to serve in county- or prefectural-level offices, as well as in upper-echelon civilian posts in the provincial governments, where they would remain in office for a fixed term (usually no more than three years) before returning to the capital. Meanwhile, local elites served exclusively in lower-echelon posts or in the local provincial military.⁵⁰

However, though it was the same “aristocratic” families that continued to dominate power throughout the dynasty, there were discontinuities over time in the structure and makeup of the capital elite. Perhaps the most important change involved the rise to much greater political prominence of Luoyang families. Whereas Luoyang had been a secondary political center in the 650s, it grew by the 720s to be on par with Chang'an as a place where powerful patrilineal families concentrated. Most notable among the Luoyang-based families acquiring a new influence at court were the marriage-ban clans—that is, those patrilineal families at the core of one of the two marriage cliques. A more systematic analysis of Luoyang epitaphs dating to the intermediary decades between the 650s and 720s may clarify when precisely the Luoyang elites acquired their new prominence (and when and to what extent families of the marriage-ban clique relocated

⁵⁰For more on the ninth-century situation, see Tackett, *Destruction*, 182.

there from Hebei at this time). But, in all likelihood, Empress Wu's reign played a critical role. Not only did she move the imperial court to Luoyang, but she also famously sought to staff the bureaucracy with men loyal to her rather than to the Tang imperial clan. And what better group to elevate than a cluster of prestigious old families that, unlike the families of their rival marriage clique, had not intermarried extensively with the Tang imperial house?⁵¹

The data here also sheds new light on the pre-Sui regional elites. In Chen Yinke's classic account, court politics of the seventh and eighth centuries were driven by factional struggles between three regional blocks—a northwestern, a northeastern, and a southern elite—with origins in the regional regimes of the sixth century.⁵² The present study suggests that, though he had access to far less empirical data, Chen was not far off the mark. Indeed, the marriage-ban clique can be thought of as a block of families with predominantly northeastern origins. But one should not overstate the significance of regional origin as a source of political solidarity. The imperial-clan clique was less monolithic than the marriage-ban clique, and it included families from the northeast (and south) as well. Moreover, throughout the dynasty, the two cliques intermarried with each other at a low but relatively consistent rate. Finally, although Chen and others have argued that Empress Wu ushered in a class struggle between an old elite and a newly risen class of bureaucrats, it is more likely given available data that the old aristocratic families faced no significant new rivals. Right into the ninth century, the primary actors in competition with each other for political power came from a single large marriage network of patriline, nearly all of which had officeholding traditions going back to pre-dynastic times.

If both cliques and the bulk of the broader capital-based marriage network were composed of northwestern or northeastern families, what might one surmise about the southern elite in the Tang? Historians have long ago noted the dominance of the northern elite at the early Tang court.⁵³ An analysis of the pre-Sui origins of elite Tang patriline, as well as of choronym usage in capital epitaphs, suggests that southerners further declined in influence over the course of the Tang Dynasty. Their decline may reflect in part how social capital contributes to political reproduction. Southern patriline were peripheral members of the marriage network of political elites, putting them at a disadvantage in competing with the core patriline of the network.⁵⁴ There may have been pull factors in addition, encouraging southern families to shun office and remain in the south. As I have previously noted, in the provinces (i.e. away from the capitals and Capital Corridor), it was only in the south that one could still find as late as the ninth century scions of the old aristocratic families inhabiting their places

⁵¹Maeda Aiko has previously argued this point. See "Jotei Bu Sokuten to Tōdai kizoku."

⁵²Chen Yinke, *Tangdai zhengzhi shi shulun gao*. For an early critique of the idea of regional blocks as the basis of political factionalism, see Howard J. Wechsler, "Factionalism in Early T'ang Government," in *Perspectives on the T'ang*, edited by Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 87–120.

⁵³For example, Nunome Chōfū 布目潮風, *Zui Tō shi kenkyū: Tōchō seiken no keisei 隋唐史研究: 唐朝政權の形成* (Tokyo: Tōyōshi Kenkyūkai, 1968). Cf. Wechsler, "Factionalism in Early T'ang Government," who argues that the early Tang emperors sought to balance the power of northwesterners, northeasterners, and southerners. My data corroborates Wechsler's, but shows that the prominence of southerners rapidly declined after the early Tang.

⁵⁴Indeed, Mao Hanguang has shown that a small number of families actually increased their influence over time and came to represent by the end of the Tang Dynasty close to half of all known officeholders. See "Tangdai tongzhi jieceng shehui biandong," esp. 223–24.

of ancestral origin.⁵⁵ These families had no ties to officialdom, yet still managed to survive as a local elite. It is possible that, far from the political center and the much greater concentration of military power in the north, it was easier for families to persist for centuries entrenched in local society, where they perhaps took advantage of new economic opportunities.

One last point to consider in light of the data presented above is somewhat more speculative, and concerns how cultural capital was deployed as a strategy for maintaining long-term political influence. As others have noted, the Sui and early Tang courts compiled lists of eminent clans from across the realm, identifying these clans by surname and choronym. Though such lists did not guarantee a family easier access to office (as they may have had under earlier dynasties), their very compilation suggests they may have played an informal role in the selection of bureaucrats. It has been argued that the court's decision to abandon such genealogical projects by the mid-eighth century reflected the end of the aristocratic age, especially given that it coincided with a moderate expansion in the use of the civil service examination for bureaucratic recruitment. How then would certain illustrious patrilineal families with long histories of bureaucratic service have adapted effectively to changing circumstances, as the empirical data would suggest they did? The greater density of intermarriages between marriage-ban clans in the post-An Lushan period reflected the more extensive deployment of social capital as a resource for political reproduction.⁵⁶ This strategy was combined with concerted efforts by the old families to articulate clearly their distinction from the rest of society. Choronyms became a more explicit component of their identity, as reflected in their greater use in the title lines of epitaphs. But choronyms were insufficient in themselves to define the most powerful elites, as increasing numbers of descendants of the great families could claim such illustrious pedigrees. Thus, simultaneously, the most eminent and successful branches of the aristocracy made renewed efforts in their funerary biographies (and presumably in other public writings) to lionize the officeholders among their immediate ancestors (including three generations up the patriline) and relatives by marriage (especially maternal grandfathers and fathers-in-law).⁵⁷ Not coincidentally, it was in the ninth century (and, as far as I can tell, not earlier) that one encounters a number of epitaphs with long and elaborate celebrations of the deceased for her or his family's generations of officeholding and generations of good marriages.⁵⁸ These ways of asserting one family's eminence became part of a multi-pronged strategy for maintaining political power under changing circumstances.

⁵⁵Tackett, *Destruction*, 45–55.

⁵⁶For concrete examples of the deployment of social capital in the ninth century, see Tackett, *Destruction*, 129–41.

⁵⁷I have also noticed a greater tendency in epitaphs of the seventh century to confuse ancestors (e.g. skip from the grandfather to the great great grandfather) or to confuse ancestors' offices (e.g. mix up the great grandfather's office with the grandfather's office), suggesting to me that it was in the eighth century that families began to take more care in compiling genealogies and standardizing their contents.

⁵⁸For an example, see Tackett, *Destruction*, 27–28.