

An Exploration of the Reasons Why Empress Liu of the Northern Song Dynasty Did Not Claim the Title of Emperor

Xiaoyu Wang

School of Humanities and New Media, Yangtze University, Jingzhou 434000, China

Abstract: This paper analyzes the multiple reasons why Empress Zhangxian Mingsu of the Northern Song Dynasty, Liu E, never ascended the throne despite her long-term grip on power. Her humble origins left her without the backing of a powerful political faction or imperial in-laws; the Song Dynasty's imperial examination system eroded the influence of aristocratic clans, making stable alliances of interest difficult to form; The civil official advisory system and the state policy of "prioritizing civil over military affairs" imposed constraints. Furthermore, bound by traditional moral codes, she harbored no ambition to claim the throne. Having already exercised imperial authority in practice, she ultimately remained a regent behind the curtain, becoming the Song dynasty's first empress dowager to rule rather than an empress.

Keywords: Liu E, the Tianxi faction struggle, ruling from behind the curtain.

1. Introduction

Empress Liu of the Northern Song Dynasty was named Empress by Song Zhenzong Zhao Heng in the fifth year of the Dazhongxiangfu reign (1012). As for her origin, the History of the Song Dynasty records: "Empress Liu of Zhangxian Mingsu was a native of Huayang, whose first home was Taiyuan and later migrated to Yizhou. Ancestor Yanqing, in the Jin and Han for the right Snapdragon General; father Tong, Hu Jie Du Commanding Officer, Jiazhou assassin, from the expedition to Taiyuan, the road died. After, Tong's second daughter also". "Hou was orphaned in her infancy, and bowed to the foreigners. She was good at sowing drums." [1] Its childhood foster outside the ancestral home, with a silversmith Gong Mei came to Bianjing, "after fifteen years into the Xiang Di", because Emperor Taizong was not satisfied with his father's orders, "the king had no choice but to put the King's Palace instructed Zhang Jie Jia, the collapse of Taizong, Zhenzong that is the throne into the beauty", it can be imagined that Zhenzong's love for his favorite, "after the infancy and orphaned, bowed in the foreign clan. It can be imagined that Emperor Zhenzong was fond of her.

2. Liu E's Rise and Ascension to Power

After the death of Empress Guo, Emperor Zhenzong wanted to establish her as the queen, but "at the beginning of the establishment of the Queen Liu, Jun and Wang Dan, to the Minzhong all advised that out of the side of the micro, can not be." [2] This sowed the seeds of trouble for the later "Tianxi Party Controversy". Song Zhenzong Dazhongxiangfu five years (1012) Liu was established as the Empress, began to help Zhenzong deal with political affairs, she "sex vigilance, knowledge of books and history," knowledgeable, in the "emperor due to illness in the palace for a long time," naturally, "more things to decide on the queen. When the emperor stayed in the palace for a long time due to his illness, she naturally "decided many things to the queen". The accumulation of experience and knowledge in politics laid the foundation for her to be in charge of the government for eleven years after the death of Emperor Zhenzong, and she

became the first female ruler of the Song Dynasty to be in charge of the government. Although she was born from a humble background, she was able to be ranked side by side with Wu Zetian and Empress Lu, and she was called by the later generation as "having the talent of Lu Wu, without the evil of Lu Wu".

A Continuation of Zi Zhi Tong Jian reads: "In the first year of Qianxing (1022), in the fifth year of the Qianxing reign (1022), the emperor collapsed in the Hall of Yanqing. Renzong became emperor. His posthumous edict honored the empress as the empress, and took the empress as the authority in military and state affairs." [3] As Empress Liu began her eleven-year reign as the Empress. In the Song Dynasty, the eight curtain dowager empress, Liu dowager is the longest, but also the greatest power, and can even be said to hold the Song Dynasty in fact the highest decision-making power, and Wu Zetian in the high Zong auxiliary status is similar. And succeeded Song Renzong Zhao Zhen is his adopted son is not a son, but not like Wu Huang general change of dynasty, become the first female emperor of Song Dynasty. To explore the reasons why Empress Liu did not become the emperor when she was in power, we need to discuss the social environment, the system, and her involvement in politics and personal qualities at that time.

3. Internal and External Factors Constraining Liu E's Claim to the Throne

The main factor was that Empress Liu lacked the support of a strong political force. In the Sui and Tang dynasties since the implementation of the imperial examination, the humble commoners rely on the examination gradually into the court, in the politics of the voice is also more and more strong; and after the end of the Tang dynasty, the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms chaos, when the power of the clans and clansmen has long been greatly reduced, to the Song dynasty has been declining. The most vivid portrayal of this is "the old time Wang Xie Tangqian Yan, flying into the common people's homes". In the Tang Dynasty, Wu Zetian "only talent is the

selection", expanding the imperial examination system, but also the addition of the martial arts examination, to the common people of the humble family to provide a large number of opportunities to enter the officialdom, such as the Changsun group of Guanlong Shi clan depreciation. The officials of the commoner clans whom she recruited became Wu Zetian's strong support in the imperial court, and Wu Zetian became the supreme representative of their interests. [4] In the Song Dynasty, the imperial examination system was more developed than in the Tang Dynasty, and the boundaries of the common people's clans were dissolved. In this case, it was difficult to form a collective bundled interest group and maintain it for a long time, and "the benefits gathered and came, and the benefits were dispersed", and each person held a group with different political views, which was highly subjective. For example, Ding Pian and Cao Yu, who supported Empress Liu, were once prominent for a while, because they relied on these people to exercise decision-making power, but in the end, they were not immune from being demoted and reduced in rank. Under such circumstances, Empress Liu lacked the support of emerging forces, and the political forces she relied on changed from time to time, making it difficult for her to maintain her power.

In addition to the ministers in the court, the support of the group of foreign relatives could also be the supporting force for the female lord's reign. After taking power, Empress Lu appointed the sons and nephews of the Lu family as princes and vassals, and cultivated the power of the Lu family in a big way, and these people also became the cornerstone of her power; while Wu Zetian, after coming to power, installed a large number of close friends of the Wu family in the dynasty, and even intended to set up a son of the Wu family, such as Wu Sansi, as the meaning of the crown prince. The strength of the group of foreign relatives also plays an important role in whether it can better control the regime. On the other hand, Empress Liu, who came from a humble background and was an orphan girl from Shu, did not have a prominent family and a strong group of relatives, which was very unfavorable to her right to speak in the court. Weak power of the foreign relatives, Empress Liu turned her attention to the court bureaucrats surnamed Liu, Liu Ye "for the Longtuge straight Bachelor's right to Kaifeng, Ming Su, Empress Dynasty only call on. After said: 'know that the Qing name of the family for more than ten generations, want to see the family tree of the Qing, I fear that I have the same clan. Ye said: 'do not dare.' After a number of questions, the degree cannot be exempted, because the ah to the wind dizzy, servant out, begged to know Henan Province." [5] Can be seen, the Queen Mother and can not be in her position to pull together how many bureaucratic officials on her side. Can't form a political community of interest with powerful officials, can't give her political help, Empress Liu single power, it is more difficult to embark on the road to the emperor.

The changes in the political structure of the Song dynasty were even greater than those of the previous generation, as the Tang dynasty's generations of clansmen and aristocrats had been transformed into the Song dynasty's bureaucratic system, which was composed of a class of scholars who were selected by the imperial examinations, and the turnover of power was accelerated and made even more unstable. During the reign of Emperor Zhenzong, the authority of admonition was unified, and the power of the admonition officers became increasingly important. In the book, "The Emperor's Real Words on Sealing," he said, "The Emperor and the Son of Heaven are

fighting over what is right and what is wrong between them. right and wrong The one who is standing between the hall and the throne to argue with the emperor about what is right and what is wrong is also the counselor." Admonition officer on the dare to criticize the emperor's faults, the next can impeach the hundred officials of the wrong, and can be widely praised, promotion speed, and the Song Dynasty is the peak of the development of Confucianism, the Song Confucianism to care about current affairs, to serve the country for the purpose of the social atmosphere is more democratic and free, the admonition officer dares to criticize directly, the enthusiasm to participate in politics is high. Moreover, the Song Dynasty practiced the basic state policy of "emphasizing the civil and the military", and "not killing civil officials" became an agreed rule since the founding of the dynasty, which created a relatively enlightened and relaxed social atmosphere, and created a group of clean officials who dared to "speak out against their superiors", which was the most important thing in the Song Dynasty. "The Qingliu officials who dared to "speak out against the superior" had a great influence on the political situation at that time. Therefore, whether in terms of political power or social opinion, as well as considering the evaluation of later generations, there were great obstacles on the way of Empress Liu wanting to claim the throne.

Song Dai Shi Wen Ying compiled "Xiangshan wild record" in "Ming Su Queen Mother want to visit the temple under the imperial robe. Admonishments on the hand, and then the ministers to discuss, all do not listen to. May not have to tell the birth, Lai Xue Jian Su Gong to Guan right people tone bright and straight, not its talk, curtain outside the mouth said: 'His Majesty's great visit to the day, but also for the Han children to worship evil, daughter to worship Yes? Ming Su no answer, is the evening report to stop." Empress herself to be dressed in the emperor's clothes to the Imperial Temple to hold ceremonies, this unauthorized ritual system by the minister's fierce opposition to the end; Ming Dao two years (1033) in February, although by the minister's fierce opposition, the Empress is still dressed in the emperor's gun suit, in the Song Dynasty Imperial Temple in the Song dynasty to worship the emperors and kings of the Song dynasty. But the twelve chapters of the imperial robe pattern minus the symbol of loyalty and filial piety and cleanliness of Zong Yi and the two chapters of Zongyi and Zao, and at the same time, did not wear the swords of the male emperors. This shows that although Empress Liu had the intention of overstepping her authority, she was still subject to the constraints of the civil officials and could not do whatever she wanted. In the "Long Edition of the Renewed Ziji Tongjian", Fu Bi said: "In the past, when Zhuang Xian was in power, His Majesty was under control, and the matter was too weak, and Zhuang Xian did not dare to carry out the story of the Empress Wu, which relied on one or two loyal ministers to save him, so that Zhuang Xian could not indulge in his desires, and His Majesty could keep his position, which was the strength of the loyal ministers. Now that Your Majesty has found temporary peace, you have forgotten the loyal ministers of the past and condemned them to be expelled for their sins. Your Majesty, with the dignity of the Emperor, said that the abolition of a woman is a small matter, but the damage to the body is very great". Fu Bi's words did point out the role of bureaucrats in preventing the Empress from overstepping her authority and claiming the throne.

In the previous dynasty, Emperor Wu stole the royal power of Li Tang and changed the name from Tang to Zhou, and

"risked universal condemnation" by assuming the title of Emperor in the capacity of a woman, thus causing Li Tang to change its name. In view of this, it is only natural that subsequent dynasties would also take this into consideration and put in place certain measures to prevent the emergence of a "second Wu Zetian" in their own dynasties. The founding of the Song Dynasty, in addition to the "release of military power by cups of wine", "emphasizing the civil and military" and other measures to greatly reduce the power of the military officials, to prevent the recurrence of the phenomenon of the end of the Tang Dynasty, which led to the decline of the imperial power, in the prevention of the power of foreign relatives, clansmen in this regard, also formulated a relatively strict avoidance of the law, restricting Clansmen, relatives of the entry and use, to avoid the scourge of the previous generation. To a certain extent, the application of these measures did play a role in restraining Liu from claiming the throne, and the "ancestral family law" that must be followed was always a major obstacle to Empress Liu's claim to the throne.

4. Personal Choices and Historical Assessment

In addition to the objective external constraints mentioned above, the subjective factors that existed in Liu herself were also important factors that prevented her from claiming the throne. "The junior minister Fang Zhong Gong wrote a letter, please follow the story of Empress Wu, set up Liu's temple, and Cheng Lin also presented the 'Empress Wu Lin dynasty map', after throwing his book on the ground said: 'I will not do this negative ancestor thing'", Qianxing first year (1022) August, the Empress to let the inner wait for the oracle, made it clear that: "Hou on the spring and fall long, that is, when the return of politics." All these show that she had the desire to control the power and hold the dynasty, but did not have the ambition to be the emperor. And Empress Liu was not as rigid and bold or even cruel as Emperor Wu. [6] Empress Wu had a great thirst for power, and she did not hesitate to kill her own son, and to consolidate her power, she executed her son-in-law, so that her children and grandchildren were afraid of her. And Liu different, although she did not have a son, treating Renzong Zhao Zhen is love and care, Renzong sick will be prohibited from eating seafood food and incurred Renzong dissatisfaction, not to mention cruelty to kill the? And the former Wu Zetian emperor of the former car, although the emperor of the scenery for a while, but the end of the miserable, was forced to abdicate by the coup of the children and grandchildren, the tragic death of the language Shangyang Palace, but also fell into the later generations of a scornful voice, and then intended to emulate the Queen of Wu after the Wei and Princess of Anle was also killed in the Tanglong coup d'état, these examples can not help but be warned of the Queen Dowager Liu.

Although Empress Liu does not have the name of the emperor, but can grasp the decision-making power, and "in and out of the Royal Da'an carriage, whip to wait for the guard as a ride." "Empress Yiwei since the Qianxing yuan Renzong succeeded to the throne, Zhang Xian, Empress pre-political, to be the beginning of Wei". Empress's honor and glory none, and even "make the world to avoid the Empress's father's name", and "close relatives more and ancestor's name to avoid", the Empress's father's name to let the world to avoid. "Qianxing first year, the Empress's birthday for the

Changing Festival. Tian Sheng seven years, the edict of the Changing Festival hundred officials to give clothes, the world to give feasts, are like the Qianxing Festival". Can be seen to enjoy even higher than the general dowager should be honored decent, and she adjusted the official institutions, reform the system of science and technology, restore the system of science and technology, tax relief, rectify the Yellow River floods, organized by the Jiangnan water conservancy and other practical actions, in fact, has been exercising an emperor's right to rule the country. In this way, it does not make much sense for Empress Liu to call herself an emperor or not to call herself an emperor.

Of course, the most important point that cannot be ignored is the influence of traditional moral thinking on society. Ancient society has always been hostile to the phenomenon of female chickens in the morning, practicing the "male dominated the outside and female dominated the inside", "Women's Rules", "Women's Training" and such books are even more confined to the thinking of women in ancient times, and compared to the Tang Dynasty, when the social atmosphere was more open and women's status was relatively high, the Song Dynasty was more strictly prevented from female interference in the government, and women's status declined. Empress Liu's social and moral values influenced her thinking. Although she had the desire for power, she did not have the ambition to usurp the throne. Qianxing first year (1022), "since the upper is not hesitant since Empress all dumping palace boudoir in the makeup and wealth, sent envoys to the Taoist Palace, Buddhist temples, the world's most famous mountains and scenic spots for the blessing of the upper can not be won". Taizong's two princesses into the palace to see, the Empress said "aunt old enough", "order around to give to the beads and guillotines Pashou". True Father's brother's wife also asked to give the head, Liu said "eldest princess, Emperor Taizong's daughter, the former emperor's sisters; if the Zhao family old woman, rather than compare?" Her maidservant saw Renzong's courtesans have "hairpins and ergonomics" and wanted to follow suit, Liu said, "His emperor and the imperial decoration, you can learn. It can be seen that Empress Liu's heart to the traditional thinking and hierarchical order is more follow recognized.

Although she was an orphan girl, she became the first empress of the Song Dynasty to implement various initiatives for the benefit of the country and the people, laying the foundation for the "reign of Emperor Renzong". Empress Liu's hands are in the hands of the real power rather than the name, so whether faced with all kinds of external constraints or history of their own inner inherent traditional thinking, she will not claim the throne.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Liu E's decision not to proclaim herself emperor, despite wielding de facto supreme power for over a decade, was the result of a complex interplay of structural constraints and personal choice. Externally, she was constrained by the Song political structure—a powerful and vocal literati bureaucracy, the absence of a strong hereditary aristocratic or reliable external clan to form a coalition, and the potent cautionary tale of Wu Zetian's reign. Internally, her self-identification within the traditional Confucian framework and a lack of personal ambition for the imperial title ultimately prevailed. Thus, she contented herself with the substance of power rather than its symbol, skillfully navigating the constraints of her era to become a formidable

regent who governed effectively without overthrowing the dynasty, thereby securing a significantly more positive legacy in official history.

References

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