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A Chronology of the Reigns and Reign-Periods  
of the Song Dynasty (960-1279)

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Few scholars of the Song or any other period in Chinese history would dispute the underlying premise of this brief communication: when converting a lunar date into an equivalent Western date, one should always strive to provide a precise computation. Several useful chronologies have been compiled and published to serve this very purpose. Perhaps the most frequently used of these works are Xue Zhongsan 薛仲三 and Qiyang Yi's 歐陽頔 *Liangqiannianlai Zhong-Xi li duizhao biao* 兩千年來中西曆對照表 (A Sino-Western Calendar for Two Thousand Years, 1-2000 A.D.) (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1940; several later reprints) and Chen Yuan's 陳垣 *Zhong-Xi-Hui shi rili* 中西回史日曆 (A Daily Calendar for Chinese, Western, and Mohammedan History) (Beijing: Sinological Research Institute of the National University of Beijing, 1926; several later reprints). These works and their numerous analogues provide conversion tables that allow the user to quickly translate lunar dates into Western dates and vice versa.

Unfortunately, most of these chronologies provide neither the precise accession dates for individual emperors nor the exact calendric references for their various reign-periods, or *nianhao* 年號. In order to locate such information we must usually turn either to primary sources or to specialized reference works, if they are available. For the Tang and Song periods, at least, accurate chronologies have been published and are immediately accessible in most research libraries housing East Asian collections. I refer of course to the *Tōdai no koyomi* 唐代的曆 (Kyoto: Kyoto University, Jimbunkagaku kenkyūsho, 1954), which is the first volume in the *Tōdai kenkyū no shiori* 唐代研究のしおり series, and to the two-volume *Sōdai shi nempyō* 宋代史年表, compiled by the Sōshi teiyō hesen kyōryoku iinkai 宋史提要編纂協力委員会 and published in Tokyo by the Tōyō bunko 東洋文庫 (the "Northern Song" volume appeared in 1967; the "Southern Song" volume was published in 1974). Despite the ready availability of these and other handy reference tools,<sup>1</sup> the authors of many Western-language works published within the last few decades have revealed a remarkable proclivity for providing inaccurate calendric notations, especially with reference to regnal dates and reign-periods. My colleague at the University of Colorado, Paul W. Kroll, recently published an article in which he provides a convenient and accurate listing of the accession dates of Tang monarchs and the exact dates of their

<sup>1</sup>Two additional chronologies of the Song that are useful and merit mention are Christian Cochini and Anna Seidel's *Chronique de la dynastie des Sung (960-1279)* (München: Universitt München, 1968), and "Chronology of the Sung Dynasty, 960-1279," which appears in Chun-shu Chang [Zhang Chunshu] and Joan Smythe, trs., *South China in the Twelfth Century: A Translation of Lu Yu's Travel Diaries, July 3-December 6, 1170* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1981), pp.26-29. The first work is based on the Song dynasty portion of Jian Bozan 翦伯贊 et al., *Zhongwai lishi nianbiao* 中外歷史年表 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962).

*nianhao*.<sup>2</sup> I propose to do the same here, but with reference to the Song period.

Before turning to the tables of Song accession and reign-dates provided below, let us briefly digress to a related topic: the dates of the Song dynasty itself. There seems to be little confusion about the year in which the dynasty began—960 (to be exact, 4 February 960 on the Western calendar), and when it ended—1279 (19 March 1279 on the Western calendar). The first of these dates marks the official founding of the Song, while the second indicates the year in which Zhao Bing (or Di Bing), the ultimate Song sovereign, died. These dates can be easily verified in the standard source works on Song history. Regarding the dates of what later became known as the "Northern Song" and "Southern Song" periods, however, we sometimes find disagreement in various Western sources. Perhaps the most common apportionment we find for these eras is "960-1126" and "1127-1279," respectively. If for a moment we assume these chronologies are correct, then it would seem that the Northern Song period culminated precisely at midnight on New Year's Eve, 1127. Historical circumstances are rarely so accommodating.

To cite just one more example of carelessness with regard to dating the Northern and Southern Song periods, in a list of the "Principal Dynasties of Chinese History" provided in an anthology of Chinese poetry recently published by a major university press we find the dates for the Northern Song given as "960-1125," and those for the Southern Song given as "1127-1279." The second reference is correct. The problem here is the date "960-1125." Has the Song somehow "lost" two years of its history? Again, a simple check of the *Song shi* 宋史 or the *Sōdai shi nempyō*, to cite just two sources, will reveal that the Muzhen siege of Kaifeng did not end until 9 January 1127 (on the Western calendar).

The confusion about the termination date of the Northern Song may be due in part to the fact that Kaifeng fell on the twenty-fifth day of the intercalary eleventh lunar month of the inaugural (and only) year of the *Jingkang* (or "Settled Salubrity") reign-period, which is listed in most chronological tables as corresponding to the Western year of "1126." When accurately converted, however, date in question actually corresponds to 9 January 1127. Thus, the correct Western dates for the Northern and Southern Song periods should be given as "960-1127" and "1127-1279," respectively.

The first table I have prepared lists the eighteen monarchs of the Song, their personal names, birth and death dates, and the true dates on which they ascended the throne. All calendric references are to the Western calendar. Most of the dates furnished in the table below are based on information provided in the *Song shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977) and in the *Sōdai shi nempyō*:

#### I. The Emperors of the Song and Their Dates of Accession

<sup>2</sup>See his "The True Dates of the Reigns and Reign-Periods of T'ang," in *T'ang Studies* 2 (Winter, 1984), 25-30.



Posthumous Name	Personal Name and Dates	Date of Accession
Tai Zu 太祖	Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤 B: 21 Mar. 927 D: 14 Nov. 976	3 Feb. 960
Tai Zong 太宗	Zhao Gui 趙炅 B: 20 Nov. 939 D: 8 May 997	15 Nov. 976
Zhen Zong 真宗	Zhao Heng 趙恆(恒) B: 23 Dec. 968 D: 23 Mar. 1022	8 May 997
Ren Zong 仁宗	Zhao Zhen 趙禎 B: 30 May 1010 D: 30 Apr. 1063	23 Mar. 1022
Ying Zong 英宗	Zhao Shu 趙曙 B: 16 Feb. 1032 D: 25 Jan. 1067	1 May 1063
Shen Zong 神宗	Zhao Xu 趙頊 B: 25 May 1048 D: 1 Apr. 1085	25 Jan. 1067
Zhe Zong 哲宗	Zhao Xu 趙煦 B: 4 Jan. 1077 D: 23 Feb. 1100	1 Apr. 1085
Hui Zong 徽宗	Zhao Ji 趙佶 B: 2 Nov. 1082 D: 4 Jun. 1135	23 Feb. 1100
Qin Zong 欽宗	Zhao Huan 趙桓 B: 23 May 1100 D: 14 Jun. 1161	18 Jan. 1126 <sup>3</sup>
Gao Zong 高宗	Zhao Gou 趙構 B: 12 Jun. 1107 D: 9 Nov. 1187	12 June 1127
Xiao Zong 孝宗	Zhao Shen 趙昚(慎) B: 27 Nov. 1127 D: 28 Jun. 1194	24 July 1162
Guang Zong 光宗	Zhao Dun 趙惇 B: 30 Sept. 1147 D: 17 Sept. 1200	18 Feb. 1189
Ning Zong 寧宗	Zhao Ruo 趙擴 B: 19 Nov. 1168 D: 17 Sept. 1224	24 July 1194
Li Zong 理宗	Zhao Yun 趙昀	17 Sept. 1224

<sup>3</sup>Zhao Huan was dethroned on 20 April, and then captured by the Jin on 10 May, 1127.

	B: 26 Jan. 1205 D: 16 Nov. 1264	
Du Zong 度宗	Zhao Qi 趙禔(禔)	16 Nov. 1264
	B: 2 May 1240 D: 12 Aug. 1274	
Gong Zong 恭宗	Zhao Xian 趙焜	12 Aug. 1274
	B: 2 Nov. 1271 D: 1323	
(or Di Xian 帝焜)	Zhao Shi 趙昞	14 June 1276
Duan Zong 端宗	B: 1268 or 1269 <sup>4</sup> D: 8 May 1278	
(or Di Shi 帝昞)	Zhao Bing 趙昞	10 May 1278
Di Bing 帝昞	B: 12 Feb. 1272 D: 19 Mar. 1279	
(End of the Song dynasty, 19 March 1279)		

My second table lists the fifty-seven reign-periods of the Song and their exact inaugural dates by Western reckoning. These calendric notations are based on information provided in the *Sōdai shi nempyō*. An asterisk placed before a date indicates that it coincides with New Year's Day on the lunar calendar. I have also supplied English translations for each reign-name. To be sure, the meanings and referents of these locutions have long been neglected by most translators. In general, sinologists regard references such as simply as time markers, and usually render them something like "second year of the Qiande reign-period." On other, perhaps less frequent occasions, they only furnish an approximate Western date, which in this case would be 964. But what if the literal meaning of a *nianhao* is in some way related to the text one is translating or to the subject one is writing about? This happens, I think, more often than most scholars realize. And, I would argue, reign-names need to be translated on such occasions.<sup>5</sup>

Although a few studies on Chinese reign-dates have been published,<sup>6</sup> a

<sup>4</sup>The precise date of Zhao Shi's birth is problematic. See the remarks by Chan Hok-lam [Chen Xuelin] in *Sung Biographies*, ed. Herbert Franke (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976), II, 1018.

<sup>5</sup> Edward H. Schafer made this same argument in an essay published more than three decades ago. See his "Chinese Reign-Names—Words or Nonsense Syllables?," *Wen-ti*, Yale University, No.3 (July, 1952), 35.

<sup>6</sup>See, for instance, Arthur F. Wright and Edward Fagan, "Era Names and Zeitgeist: A Review Discussion," *Asiatische Studien* 5 (1951), 113-121, which discusses the hypotheses of Ichimura Sanjiro concerning the semantic qualities of Chinese *nianhao* (see note 9 below); Mary C. Wright,

comprehensive investigation of the origins of *nianhao*, their meanings, and grammatical structures is sorely needed. I suspect that a detailed study of these appellations would yield fruitful results. It would certainly enhance our understanding of reign-names and help prepare us to translate them more accurately. An investigation of these terms and their provenance might even help us to better understand the political history, intellectual trends, and even the religious thought prevalent in various periods in Chinese history. Space limitations will not allow me to engage in such an endeavor here. Instead, I will preface the list of Song reign-names below with a few brief comments concerning the referential qualities of these epithets.

At the outset we should note that Song *nianhao*, like the reign-names used during other dynasties, are heavily laden with historical and topical allusions. This trait alone at once suggests the need to be aware of their meanings and references (whenever this is possible). But most historical sources do not outline the exact reason(s) why various *nianhao* were adopted. While some of these terms, such as the Song era-name "Great Outlook" (1107-1111), were culled from the classical canons of high antiquity,<sup>7</sup> others are enigmatic and hence difficult to explain. Occasionally, however, explications are available concerning the various allusions and overtones of *nianhao* and their relation to contemporary events. A case in point with regard to the Song period occurs in Cai Tao's 蔡條 (ob. ca. 1150) *Collected Talks from the Iron-Clad Alp* 鐵圍山叢談, where we find brief but informative notes on the era-names adopted during the reign of Zhao Ji (or Hui Zong).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>"What's in a Reign Name: The Uses of History and Philology," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 18.1 (Nov., 1958), 103-106; Edward H. Schafer, "The Origin of an Era," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85.4 (Oct.-Dec., 1965), 543-550 (this article concerns the Tang reign-name Baoying 寶應, 762-763), and Elling O. Eide, "Li Po's Riddle Naming Cloud-Ritual Hsu in Relation to the Feng Sacrifice of 742 and the Great Heavenly Treasure Scandal to Which is Appended A Note on the Stamping Songs and Sino-Turkish Name for the Huns," *T'ang Studies* 1 (1982?), 8-20. This last-mentioned essay offers a new interpretation for the Tang era-name Tianbao 天寶, 742-756.

<sup>8</sup>In this instance, from the opening line of the commentary on the twentieth hexagram ( 觀 ) in the *Yi jing* (Sibucongkan ed., 2.14): "The Great Outlook lies [with the one] above" 大觀在上. Also, the verb-object *jingguo* in the reign-name "Establishing Centrality and Settling the Nation" (1101-1102) may be drawn from the following line in the *Zuozhuan*: "I have done so in order to settle the nation" 吾以靖國也. See James Legge, tr., *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, in *The Chinese Classics* (1872; rpt. Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1971), V, 184.

<sup>8</sup>Cai Tao, *Tiewei shan congkan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), pp.12-13. Additional glosses on various Song *nianhao* can be found in the following works: Li Xinchuan 李心傳 (1166-1243), *Jianyan yilai chaoye zaji* (Taipei:

Now, Song *nianhao* seem to fall into one (or more) of four broad categories.<sup>9</sup> The first and most common of these includes era-names selected with the idea in mind of inaugurating and later realizing the hopes and aspirations suggested by the title. Examples of these would be "Establishing Eminence" (960-963), "Felicitous Prime" (1195-1201),<sup>10</sup> and "Total Purity" (1265-1275). The second category comprises *nianhao* that suggest the revitalization and perpetuation of past glories, policies, and accomplishments. The epithet "Continued Sageness" (1094-1098), which, according to Ichimura Sanjirō, signifies the "return" to power of the Reformers in 1094 and the reestablishment of the "sage-like" leadership qualities of Zhao Xu (or Shen Zong), would be an example of this type of era-name.<sup>11</sup> Additional examples are "Continued Ascendancy" (1131-1163) and "Continued Serenity" (1190-1195). On other occasions, the reign-name might indicate a desired shift or change in the direction of government and its policies. Two examples of this would be "Pure Transformation" (990-995) and "Establishing Centrality and Settling the Nation" (1101-1102). It is well known, for instance, that the latter was adopted in 1101 in order to suggest a new course of compromise between the Conservatives and the Reformers.<sup>12</sup> The fourth and apparently least common variety of Song reign-dates are those that commemorate auspicious events. Surely the best-known historical example of such an occurrence during the Song is the reign-name "Great Centrality and Auspicious Talisman" (1008-1017), which was adopted after the appearance of three "Heavenly Texts" in the imperial precincts of Kaifeng in 1008.<sup>13</sup> Another would be "Auspicious

Wenhai chubanshe, 1967), 3.1b-2a; Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123-1202), *Rongzhai suibi* 容齋隨筆 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), I, 341; and Jiang Shaoyu 江少虞 (jinshi ca. 1115), *Songchao shishi leivuan* 宋朝事實類苑 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 32.405.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. the various categories of Chinese era-names suggested by Ichimura Sanjirō in his "Nengō ni arawaretaru jidai shisō" 年號の現はれに於ての時代分類, in *Shicaku zasshi* 39.4 (1928), 319-337.

<sup>10</sup>It should also be noted that this *nianhao* was formed by selecting the words "felicitous" (*qing*) and "prime" (*yan*) from the earlier reign-names of "Felicitous Chronometry" (1041-1049) and "Prime Safekeeping" (1086-1094). See the remarks on this in the *Jianyan yilai chaoye zaji*, 3.2a. It was not unusual for era-names to be selected in this way. For additional examples see Zhang Hao 張浚 (ca.1180-ca.1250), *Yungu zaji* 雲谷雜記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 3.36.

<sup>11</sup>See Ichimura, "Nengō," 328; Wright and Fagan, 120.

<sup>12</sup>See the comments by Cai Tao in the *Tiewei shan congkan*, p.12.

<sup>13</sup>The events surrounding the appearance of these numinous texts are discussed in Suzanne E. Cahill, "Taoism at the Sung Court: The Heavenly Text Affair of 1008," *The Bulletin of Sung-Yuan Studies* 16 (1980), 23-44. "Great Centrality and Auspicious Talisman" was apparently the title of the Heavenly



Ascendency" (1278-1279), which allegedly was selected in order to commemorate the appearance of a yellow dragon in the sea.<sup>14</sup>

I will be the first to admit that the categories enumerated above are far from being exhaustive, and that the translations proffered in the list below are anything but final. At most, I am simply suggesting one way by which we may begin to approach and understand these terms and render them into English translation. Although I think that my renditions of Song *nianhao* below can be defended on philological grounds, I enthusiastically invite readers of this distinguished journal to point out instances where historical evidence suggests a different meaning.

## II. The Reign-Periods of the Song

Reign-name	Translation	Inaugural Date
Jianlong 建隆	"Establishing Eminence"	4 Feb. 960
Qiande 乾德	"Supernal Virtue"	4 Dec. 963
Kaibao 開寶	"Opened Treasure"	16 Dec. 968
Taiping xingguo 太平興國	"Ascendent Nation in Grand Tranquillity"	14 Jan. 977 <sup>15</sup>
Yongxi 雍熙	"Harmonious Serenity"	6 Dec. 984
Duangong 端拱	"Sitting Upright With Hands Folded"	7 Feb. 988
Chunhua 淳化	"Pure Transformation"	*30 Jan. 990
Zhidao 至道	"Ultimate Way"	*3 Feb. 995
Xianping 咸平	"Total Tranquillity"	*31 Jan. 998
Jingde 景德	"Spectacular Virtue"	*25 Jan. 1004
Dazhong xiangfu 大中祥符	"Great Centrality and Auspicious Talisman"	15 Feb. 1008
Tianxi 天禧	"Celestial Blessings"	*31 Jan. 1017
Qianxing 乾興	"Supernal Ascendency"	*4 Feb. 1022
Tiansheng 天聖	"Celestial Sageness"	*25 Jan. 1023
Mingdao 明道	"Enlightened Way"	11 Dec. 1032
Jingyou 景祐	"Spectacular Safekeeping"	*23 Jan. 1034

Texts. See Li Tao 李燾 (1115-1184), *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 67.1518.

<sup>14</sup>The appearance of this yellow dragon is noted briefly in the *Song shi*, 47.944.

<sup>15</sup>I strongly suspect that the inaugural (lunar) date "12-7" (十二月己亥) given for this reign-period in the *Sōdai shi nempyō* (Vol. I, p.19) is incorrect. This reference should instead read: "12-22" (十二月甲寅; 14 January 977 on the Western calendar). See *Song shi*, 4.54; *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian*, 17.387; and Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730-1797), *Xu Zizhi tongjian* 續資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 9.208.

Baoyuan 寶元	"Treasured Prime"	16 Dec. 1038
Kangding 康定	"Salubrious Fixity"	5 Apr. 1040
Qingli 慶曆	"Felicitous Chronometry"	16 Dec. 1041
Huangyou 皇祐	"August Safekeeping"	*5 Feb. 1049
Zhihe 至和	"Ultimate Accord"	26 Apr. 1054
Jiayou 嘉祐	"Elegant Safekeeping"	23 Oct. 1056
Zhiping 治平	"Ordered Tranquillity"	*21 Jan. 1064
Xining 熙寧	"Serene Peace"	*6 Feb. 1068
Yuanfeng 元豐	"Prime Abundance"	*17 Jan. 1078
Yuanyou 元祐	"Prime Safekeeping"	*18 Jan. 1086
Shaosheng 紹聖	"Continued Sageness"	29 Apr. 1094
Yuanfu 元符	"Prime Talisman"	2 July 1098
Jianzhong jingguo 建中靖國	"Establishing Centrality and Settling the Nation"	*31 Jan. 1101
Chongning 崇寧	"Exalted Peace"	*21 Jan. 1102
Daguan 大觀	"Great Outlook"	*26 Jan. 1107
Zhenghe 政和	"Administrative Accord"	*10 Feb. 1111
Chonghe 重和	"Double Accord"	15 Dec. 1118
Xuanhe 宣和	"Promulgated Accord"	16 Mar. 1119
Jinglang 靖康	"Settled Salubrity"	*25 Jan. 1126
Jianyan 建炎	"Establishing Incandescence"	12 June 1127 <sup>16</sup>
Shaoxing 紹興	"Continued Ascendency"	*31 Jan. 1131
Longxing 隆興	"Eminent Ascendency"	*5 Feb. 1163
Qian dao 乾道	"Supernal Way"	*13 Feb. 1165
Chundi 淳熙	"Pure Serenity"	*4 Feb. 1174
Shaoyi 紹熙	"Continued Serenity"	*7 Feb. 1190
Qingyuan 慶元	"Felicitous Prime"	*12 Feb. 1195
Jiatai 嘉泰	"Elegant Majesty"	*5 Feb. 1201
Kaixi 開禧	"Opened Blessings"	*22 Jan. 1205
Jiading 嘉定	"Elegant Fixity"	*19 Jan. 1208
Baoqing 寶慶	"Treasured Felicitation"	*9 Feb. 1225
Shaoding 紹定	"Continued Fixity"	*8 Feb. 1228
Duanping 端平	"Upright Tranquillity"	*31 Jan. 1234
Jiayi 嘉熙	"Elegant Splendor"	*28 Jan. 1237
Chunyou 淳祐	"Pure Safekeeping"	*13 Feb. 1241
Baoyou 寶祐	"Treasured Safekeeping"	*31 Jan. 1253
Kaiping 開慶	"Opened Felicitation"	*25 Jan. 1259
Jingding 景定	"Spectacular Fixity"	*13 Feb. 1260
Xianchun 咸淳	"Total Purity"	*19 Jan. 1265

<sup>16</sup>Vol. 1 of the *Sōdai shi nempyō* (p.201) lists this reign-period as beginning on the lunar date "4-27" (or 8 June 1127). In Vol. II (p.2), the editors provide a different reference: "5-1" (12 June 1127). The latter date is the correct one. See *Song shi*, 24.443.

Deyou 德祐	"Virtuous Safekeeping"	*29 Jan. 1275
Jingyan 景炎	"Spectacular Incandescence"	14 June 1276
Xiangxing 祥興	"Auspicious Ascendency"	23 May 1278