

## The disbandment of tribes by the Northern Wei Dynasty: Analysis of the epitaph of Yuang Chang

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The present article reexamines the longstanding debate over the Northern Wei Dynasty's disbandment of tribal peoples within its territory, through an analysis of the words, 太和十二年, 代都平城改侯勳曹, 創立司州, contained in the epitaph of Yuang Chang 元萇, discovered in the city of Ji Yuan, Henan Province in 2003.

The author begins with the characters *siqincao* 侯勳曹. *Siqin* 侯勳 designates the bureaucratic name given to tribal chieftains among the Kumoxi and Murong-bu among the Xianbei people as well as the Rouran, and is similar to the Türküt Irkin 侯斤. From the fact that the Murong-bu governed their tribes by installing eight *sili* 侯釐 in the central, eastern, etc. areas of their territory, *siqincao*, which combines the Hui term 侯勳 with *cao*, the Han term for administrative center, therefore means tribal area governance agency, which is expressed in the *Weishu* 魏書 as Babu Daifu 八部大夫 (hereafter Baguo 八国), Liubu Darenguan 六部大人官, etc.

Next the author examines the development of the *Sinqincao* (Baguo) agency. In contrast to the conventional understanding that the Baguo administrative system was gradually downsized into six, then four jurisdictions, to be completely abandoned during the reign of Emperor Xiaowen (467 - 499), the author argues that 1) the institution of Baguo was created based on the nomadic traditions of such peoples as the southern Xiongnu and Xianbei and 2) the four jurisdiction *Sibu* 四部 system instituted during the reign of Emperor Taiwu (408 - 452) was still headed by eight chieftains and therefore represented no substantive change from the Baguo system. The Baguo system continued in tact until the 2nd year of the Taihe era (488), when its jurisdictions were renamed *Sizhou* 司州.

Finally, the author investigates the meaning of the abandonment of the

Sinqincao system in favor of Sizhou. It was in the 1st year of the Tianxing era (398) that Emperor Daowu established a permanent capital at Pingcheng, divided the kingdom into the Jinei 畿内 (capital) and Jiaodian 郊甸 (outer provincial) regions and established Sizhou for the purpose of governing the Han people residing there. At the same time, Sinqincao (Baguo) was established to govern the northern tribal peoples inhabiting the two regions.

The Baguo system continued in tact changing in name only from Liubu 六部 to Sibufu 八部 then back to Liubu until its abandonment in 488, at which time, Emperor Xiaowen placed the northern tribes under Sizhou governance, to be uniformly administered according to geo-political (*junxin* 郡県) districting. Therefore, the tribal disbandment carried out by Emperor Daomu cannot be said to have involved actually breaking up tribal households and registering people like Han inhabitants; but rather signifies tribal peoples affiliated with the Wei Dynasty being placed under the direct rule of the Wei emperor and governed by means of the Sinqincao system.