

4 Surviving Conquest in Dali: Chiefs, Deities, and Ancestors

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The people now known as the Bai live mostly in the areas surrounding Lake Erhai in Yunnan in southwest China. In their local dialect, they call themselves Bër Wa Dser, or People of the White (Bai) King, who was a mysterious ruler of whom there are many legends. He was one of the kings of the ancient kingdoms that existed before Nanzhao (752-902) and Dali (938-1254) (Fitzgerald 1941). Since the destruction of the Dali kingdom in 1254 during the Yuan dynasty, and, even more important, since the imposition of Ming dynasty control from 1382, members of the former Dali aristocracy have adjusted themselves to Chinese administration.¹ A consequence of the change in the political situation emerges in their lineage histories, traced both orally in legends and rituals and textually in their written genealogies. They adopted the genealogical practices common to Han people, even as legends of remote ancestors (*zu*) and local gods continued to be part of their daily life. Many Dali genealogies trace their lineage homeland to Nanjing.

Nevertheless, Dali ancestors exhibit features that are not common in the Chinese written genealogies found in most parts of China. Most Chinese written genealogies trace unilineal descent, generation by generation across multiple lines of descent from a common ancestor. For the native peoples who inhabited peripheral southwest China, the concept of "ancestor" did not necessarily require a direct kin relationship; rather, at times, ancestry was determined by kingship, social class, location, or a common legend. Condominas's (1990) research among the La Nan people of northern Thailand describes many oral stories of kings and queens of certain lineages who occupy a position superior to that of other people, similar to the position of a deity, and cults dedicated to them are sometimes the historical indicator of group identity. He argues that when the state was formed under the influence of Buddhist culture, the basis of interethnic relations was transformed from kinship to social class (Condominas 1990). At the village level, it has also been found that when the villages were brought together into a political whole, all members of the villages were recognized as the descendants of a single village founder (Lehman 1998; Du 2003). In China's Sichuan province, Wang

Mingke reports that people of different surnames sometimes share the same legend about the origins of their ancestors and consider themselves to be brothers of a single kin group (Wang 2003, 39-46). In the case of Dali, indiginization took place as a powerful state was being formed. Legend has it that before the Nanzhao kingdom unified local groups, the Nanzhao king chose to intermarry with clan and tribal leaders who inhabited the Erhai area as a means of subordinating certain groups and setting up alliances to rule the wider area of southwest China. When the offer of intermarriage was refused by these chieftains, he used the excuse of ancestor sacrifice (*jizu*) to gather them in his royal city and, there, burned them to death in the tower (Yang 1998, 11).

Apparently, in contrast to the Han people, ancestor worship in Dali went beyond the paternal line. Moreover, it was practised by the intermarried tribal chieftains of certain territories. Nanzhao's subsequent adoption of Buddhism, the conquest of Dali by the Ming, and the adoption of Chinese written genealogies that followed this period added substantially to the process of lineage formation.

Ancestry was expressed in two different genres: local legends and written genealogies. As this chapter shows, the two genres galvanized each other toward an organic designation. At different stages in the history of the Erhai region, legends and recorded lineage histories were used to create new local identities. These records might be preserved on stone steles or written in manuscripts on paper either in Chinese or in Bai (known as "literary Bai," *baiwen*).² The creation of texts manipulated history to bring genealogies in line with how people identified with competing groups across periods of instability alternately brought on by state building and state collapse. Within the Zhao clan, which is examined in depth in this chapter, different versions of lineage genealogies for different sets of the Zhao lineage ancestors signalled social changes that had a direct impact on its members. Although the resulting texts often contain incompatible and tenuous historical claims, they demonstrate how the Dali local society interacted with the state.

A Brief History of the Erhai District

It would be convenient to consider the social history of Dali in three distinct periods. During the first period, some time before 752, tribal groups that inhabited the Erhai area allied with one another to establish the rudiments of a state (Backus 1981). In 752 this alliance gave rise to the Nanzhao kingdom, which established a bureaucracy and a unified system of hereditary status headed by a class of nobility. The political, religious, and military organizations that were generated lasted until 1382, when Dali was taken over by the

Ming dynasty. Social stability appeared most marked during this second period. During the third period, from 1382, the original hierarchical status system and nobility-led bureaucracy fell into abeyance as the Ming dynasty gradually established its rule over the Erhai district. Over the next century and a half, another bureaucracy comprised of officials of the Chinese state was instituted and had become entrenched in the new status structure by the mid-sixteenth century.

Each of these three periods implies the inclusion or exclusion of specific social groups within the status structure. As the first period took shape and evolved into the second, surnames were adopted as group signifiers to centralize power among otherwise diverse social groupings (known in the records as "well-known families and big surnames," *mingjia daxing*). The discourse about ancestors and their genealogical relations in this period allowed for the centralization of these otherwise discrete and different social groups. The state bureaucracy codified their ancestral origins into a semblance of order. Narratives of ancestors were readily merged with Buddhist legends; for example, remote tribal leaders became the sons of the Buddhist king Asoka, the incarnation of Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) was transformed into a foreign monk sent as a missionary to Yunnan, and aristocratic ancestors were incorporated into the legitimated Buddhist history of the kingdom.³

The periodization outlined here acknowledges that when, in 1254, Dali was conquered by the Yuan dynasty, the Dali administration continued to function very much as it had previously. The Duan royal household continued to exert traditional political and military power in the western part of Yunnan, and the nobility controlled some military garrisons and played a dominant role in local society. Major changes were introduced only when the Yuan fell to the Ming dynasty in 1382. The families of the king and the nobles who were settled on the Dali Plain were brought under direct rule, members of the nobility from outside of the Dali Plain were recruited into the government as native officials (*tusi*), and some noble families were registered in military colonies (*tun*) (Fang 1994). All of the former noble households of the surnames Duan, Dong, Li, Zhang, Yang, and Zhao lost their hereditary statuses, and many sought to sustain their hierarchical statuses by serving in the Ming dynasty administration. A reshuffling of the Dali social structure followed. It was in this context that genealogies were manipulated to legitimate membership within the new elite.

The Historiography of the Ancestors

Legends told orally about ancestors (*zu*) are very different from the ones recorded in writing. In southwest China, the primordial ancestor (*yuanzu*)

frequently combined qualities of a local deity and those of a human in begetting the lineage. A common motif described the primordial ancestor impregnating a woman who then gave birth to the first completely human ancestor. For example, in the legend of the Dali kings, a woman was washing clothes by the river and was touched by a floating piece of wood that took the form of a serpent to impregnate her. Impregnated thus by the primordial ancestor, she gave birth to the first Dali king (Yang 1991, 49). Women were essential to the narrative: they harnessed the powers that became the primordial ancestor and brought them to bear on the process of procreation. Thus, the genealogy that traced a line of descent to a primordial ancestor linked people of the surname both to a procreator (a woman) and to the natural forces for which she stood (Lian 2005).

Legends of primordial ancestors probably had an oral origin. Until written genealogies fixed ancestral origin to a particular bloodline, the procreator bound to natural forces was probably embodied in the power hierarchy. Until at least the sixteenth century, Chinese writers noticed this connection when they designated the southwest tribal chief as the "ghost master" (*guizhu*). In this way, the deceased chieftain took charge of the welfare of the tribe as its guardian, and in return for protection, his tribe sacrificed to him (Xu 1982, 91-92; Li 2002, 47). Thus chieftains took on some qualities of deities. Where the tribal people adopted his surname as theirs, they were, in the tradition of the written genealogy, considered his descendants. As Nanzhao became a kingdom and the royal house passed a surname down its descent line, it is assumed that alliances were established between those who shared the same surname and, thereby, also enjoyed the protection of the spirits of the deceased chiefs. In this way, the tribe, or an alliance of tribes, took on the character of common-surname groups. Such groups, with or without generation-by-generation genealogies, constituted the aristocracy of the newly founded kingdom of Nanzhao (Lian 2006).

Social status could also be derived from an ancestor who was a hero. Recognition as a hero could be bestowed by a king or a people. For example, Duan Chicheng, who lived in the Duan village on the Dali Plain during the Nanzhao kingdom, was named a *tuzhu* (literally, master of a certain territory) for giving up his life while killing a serpent, an act that rescued the Dali people. He became a territorial god as well as a primordial ancestor for some villagers (Li 2002, 70-74; Yang 1998, 21).

Claims were also made of ancestors who were foreign monks from India who had accompanied Guanyin when he helped the first Nanzhao king to establish the kingdom. They helped to protect Nanzhao from its enemies and exercised their powers to enhance cultivation. Afterward, in return for their

service, the Nanzhao kings married their daughters to them. Their descendants were ritual masters of esoteric Buddhism, known in Dali as the *acarye* (*achili*). *Acarye*, which is a Sanskrit term, means "the masters of the ritual of Buddhism." In southwest China, *acarye* was a general term for monks who were skilled in esoteric Buddhism. According to local custom and in local documents, monks were usually recorded by the term *zaijia seng*, signifying that the monks lived in the family. They also had other titles like *guoshi*, meaning "state ritualists," or *tanzu*, meaning "the master of the altar" (Li 2000, 51-69). In this chapter, they are referred to as *acarye* in general, except when their political positions are emphasized. It was therefore said that three facts defined the *acarye*: they were state ritualists (*guoshi*) with esoteric skills, their skills saved the common people from life's suffering, and they were connected with noble lineages through marriage (Shi 1944, 8). They performed personal rituals for the kings, tamed the serpents to open land for cultivation in the villages, and even controlled wild animals for the military purposes of the state. Although not all of the *acarye* were directly related to the kingship clan, from the ninth to the fourteenth century, a span of about six hundred years, either they claimed that their ancestors were brought by the foreign monk or were the embodiment of Guanyin, or they enjoyed kingly relationships. These were means of strengthening the legitimacy of their status by historic significance. According to gravestone steles dating back to the early Ming, the descendants of *acarye* cross-married to ensure that the esoteric teachings were inherited within the group as a means of strengthening their ritual superiority within society. Thus, the political system of Dali prior to the Ming was a hierarchy based on religious status, and its social practice emphasized affinity rather than paternity.

Although Buddhism was very much a state religion in the last years of Nanzhao and also through the entire history of Dali, indigenous deities and sacred places continued to be given sacrifices. Some chieftains or monks who emerged from aristocratic families to serve the king were deified after death, and the legends that told of their exploits were blended into the Buddhist cosmos of the state. They could be ancestors, territorial gods, or bodhisattvas, separately or all rolled into one.

The Zhao Surname

The history of people with the Zhao surname in Dali, who call themselves the Jianfeng Zhaoshi (Jian Peak Zhao), illustrates many features of the deification of ancestors. The origin of the clan name comes from the story of a tribal chieftain, Zhao Kang, and a mountain god. Zhao Kang moved from somewhere in eastern Yunnan to the southern area of Lake Erhai before the

Nanzhao kingdom was established. Following Zhao Kang's time, members of the Zhao clan were promoted to important positions in this land, and the subprefecture of Zhao zhou was established to the south of Lake Erhai after their name. Today, they claim descent from aristocrats of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms. Located away from the centre of power in Dali city, people with the Zhao surname at Zhao zhou controlled the most strategic mountain pass at the southern end of the Dali Plain and the military guard in the southern gate, Longguan. Following the founding of the Nanzhao kingdom, the Zhao clan bore strong military and religious characteristics.

Aristocrats of the Zhao surname played a pivotal role during the Yuan and Ming conquests. The inscriptions on gravestone steles, dating between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, provide near contemporary documentation of these events. One gravestone stele, dated 1364 and found in Dali, records that Zhao Tai (?-1298) led the general of Yuan's forces to conquer the tribes that inhabited southwest China from southern Yunnan to Guangxi. For his service, he was awarded the position of Buddhist official (*sengguan*) of Dali district. His descendants inherited his position within the clerical official system under Yuan rule (Yang 1991, 23-24). When the Ming army came into Dali, it was Zhao Bao (1349-?) who brought the people of Dali to surrender to the Ming army (Yang 1991, 36). It was during this period that people of the Zhao surname moved out of Zhao zhou and onto the Dali Plain. One branch of the lineage moved into Xizhou, which came to be known as an aristocratic stronghold, and another branch settled in Taqiao (known in the genealogies as Gutaqiao), in the middle area of the Dali Plain (see Figure 4.1).⁴

Subsequent to the establishment of Ming dynasty rule, the former aristocrats of the Zhao surname reinvented themselves through their written genealogies and their legends. By examining three different texts of their lineage histories, all written by members of the Zhao surname, the following sections reconstruct the process by which the former aristocrats blended into the Ming state.

From Territorial God to Ancestor

The history of the Zhao surname begins with Zhao Kang. He had a daughter who was known to be very pretty and well cultivated and who, consequently, attracted many suitors. Zhao Kang married her as a concubine to King Luo Cheng (674-712), the second king of the Nanzhao kingdom. As Zhao Kang did not have a son, the king granted him the land located at the foot of the Five Peak Mountain (Wufengshan), to the south of Lake Erhai, and named this land Zhao zhou. Five Peak Mountain was a secret and sacred place where the deity who controlled the water source of the villages sometimes descended to earth. One day, when Zhao Kang was on this mountain, he heard the cry

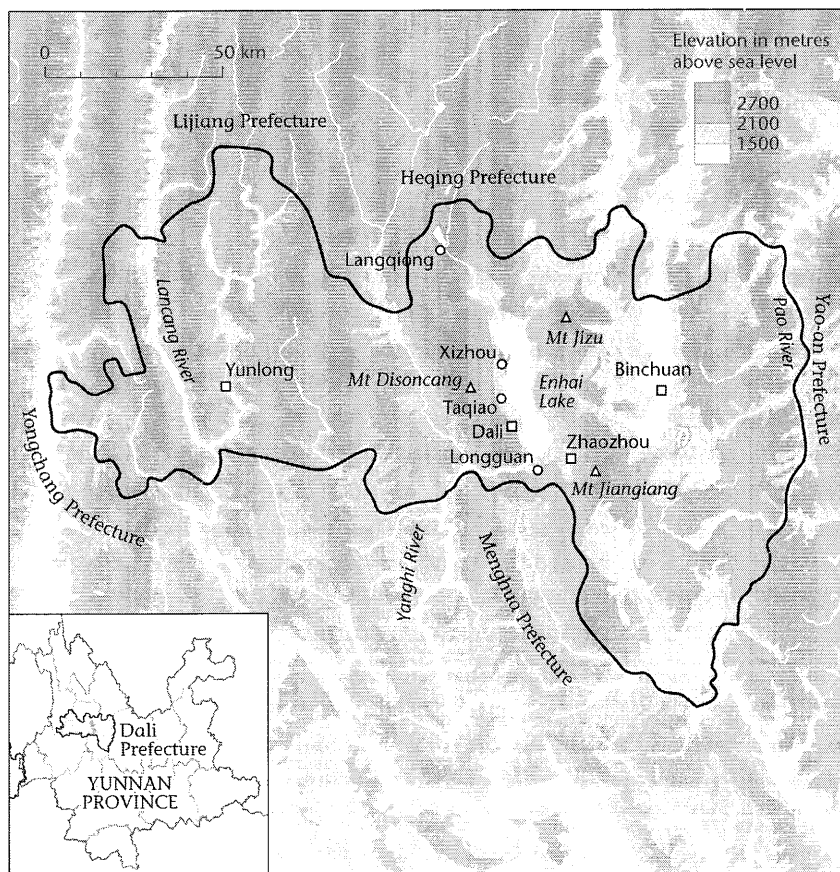


Figure 4.1 Dali Plain and Dali prefecture in the sixteenth century

of a child. He found the child and, thinking it might be the son of the mountain god, took him home to raise as his own. After he took the child home, the harvest and the domestic animals in the area flourished. As a result, after Zhao Kang's death, King Cheng Gepei (712-28), Luo Cheng's son, ordered the local people to build a sacrificial shrine for Zhao Kang as the maternal ancestor (*waizu*) at Jian Peak (Jianfeng). The term "maternal ancestor" recognizes Zhao Kang as the king's grandfather-in-law, and Jian Peak was where Zhao Kang discovered his adopted son. Although people of the Zhao surname subsequently settled in different localities, they all described themselves as having originated at Jian Peak and, as noted earlier, called themselves Jianfeng Zhaoshi (Jian Peak Zhao). A stone stele, dated 1409 and located in the Jian Peak Pavilion, provides a written version based on local tradition (Yang 1991,

30). The Jian Peak Pavilion had been a famous temple from the eighth until the nineteenth century (*Zhaozhouzhi* 1838, 273). In the thirteenth century, an official sent by the Yuan emperor described it as one of the most attractive landmarks of Zhaozhou (Guo 2001, 135). It was destroyed during the Ming advance on Dali in 1382. After the fighting, the local people requested that they be allowed to rebuild it in its original location to ensure that their lives and livelihood were protected. Their request was granted. One of the most famous local ritual specialists, Dong Xian, wrote the essay recording Zhao Kang's story in 1409 to commemorate the occasion and history.

The story of Zhao Kang was passed on through the centuries. Yet another stone stele, found in the Zhao-surname ancestral hall, records it along with the decree issued in 713 by King Cheng Gepei of Dali. Cheng Gepei's decree provides a more detailed record of Zhao Kang's political and religious position:

State building relies on virtuous people. Awarding merit, the king glorifies principles. The maternal ancestor establishes a standard of morality, encourages loyalty, opens the wilderness to cultivation, and feeds and educates the people, so the people look to him with respect, just as all things look up to the primordial heaven. To shelter your descendants with good fortune, enjoy the feast that is fitting to you. Great is the Primordial Ancestor, whose glory will last for many generations. The royal decree bestows the position of Primordial Ancestor and Great Master Who Bestows His Blessing upon Jian Peak (Yuanzu Jianfeng fuyin dashi). Every year without exception, there will be spring and autumn rituals to celebrate the master. The administrator will perform it. This is a royal command. (Yang 1991, 14)

It should be noted that Cheng Gepei named Zhao Kang the Primordial Ancestor *and* Great Master Who Bestows His Blessing upon Jian Peak. It is clear that the people who lived in the area took Zhao Kang as their primordial ancestor. It is equally clear that he was the king's maternal ancestor. In addition, the decree notes that Zhao Kang was virtuous, an able teacher, and benefited the people of this territory. Although the title recognized that he was a primordial ancestor as well as territorial god, it was on the basis that virtue should be cultivated that the king granted the title.

Comparing the two narratives, we can clearly see Zhao's dual character as mountain god and ancestor. He was the royal maternal grandfather because he married a daughter to the previous king, and he was the god of Jian Peak because he adopted the son of the mountain god. Implicit also in the

713 decree is that these claims were made by local people of the Zhao surname and that they were recognized by the state. A marriage tie with the king allowed those of the Zhao surname to claim aristocratic status. The citation of "virtue" as the prime justification for the award well illustrates the social and political shift from indigenous religion to state legitimacy.

The Zhao-surname ancestral hall in which the stele recording the decree of 713 was found was not built until the early years of the fifteenth century. The stele served as the repository for the spirits of two ancestors, one being Zhao Kang and the other Zhao Liang (see Figure 4.2). The 713 decree was appended to the line "The spirit seat of Zhao Kang," along with his titles. Also carved on the stele was the line "The spirit seat of Zhao Liang," to which another decree, dated 1384, was appended, pronounced by the Hongwu emperor of the Ming dynasty. Zhao Liang lived in the early years of the Ming dynasty and was instrumental in building the lineage. It was therefore Liang's lineage building that highlighted Zhao Kang as the primordial ancestor.

The biography of Zhao Liang may be found in the imperial decree issued by the Hongwu emperor (Yang 1991, 14) and in the 1384 imperial decree appended to his spirit "seat" on the stele. Liang was an important man in Dali in the early years of the Ming dynasty. He had served as Yunnan's chief military commander (*zongbing*). Additionally, for his military exploits on the frontier, the emperor bestowed on him the posthumous title of General Who Faces Battle, Turns Back Waves, and Conquers Armies (Yinzhen fanlang fujun jianjun). Zhao Liang, therefore, appears to have been a local man who surrendered to the Ming at the time of the Ming conquest and rose immediately to a very senior military position. The proximity of the three events – the Ming conquest, the imperial decree recording Zhao Liang's exploits, and the rebuilding of the Jian Peak Temple after the destruction of the Jian Peak Pavilion by the Ming army – constituted a political response to Ming dynasty rule. The juxtaposition of Zhao Liang and Zhao Kang on the same stele suggests that they shared an equivalent status. Subtly, the primordial ancestor's position was being supplemented with a true-blooded Ming dynasty ancestor.

It was in the Ming dynasty, therefore, that Zhao Kang became more an ancestor and less a territorial god. The restoration of the temple at Jian Peak came two decades after the establishment of Ming rule over Dali. Zhao Liang's imperial award was granted in 1384, and the stele recording this award, along with Zhao Kang's award in 713 from King Cheng Gepei, would have been set up soon after. Very possibly, at the same time, the ancestral hall to house the stele, and hence to house the spirits of Kang and Liang, would have been built. The shift from a territorial god's shrine to an ancestral hall as a focus

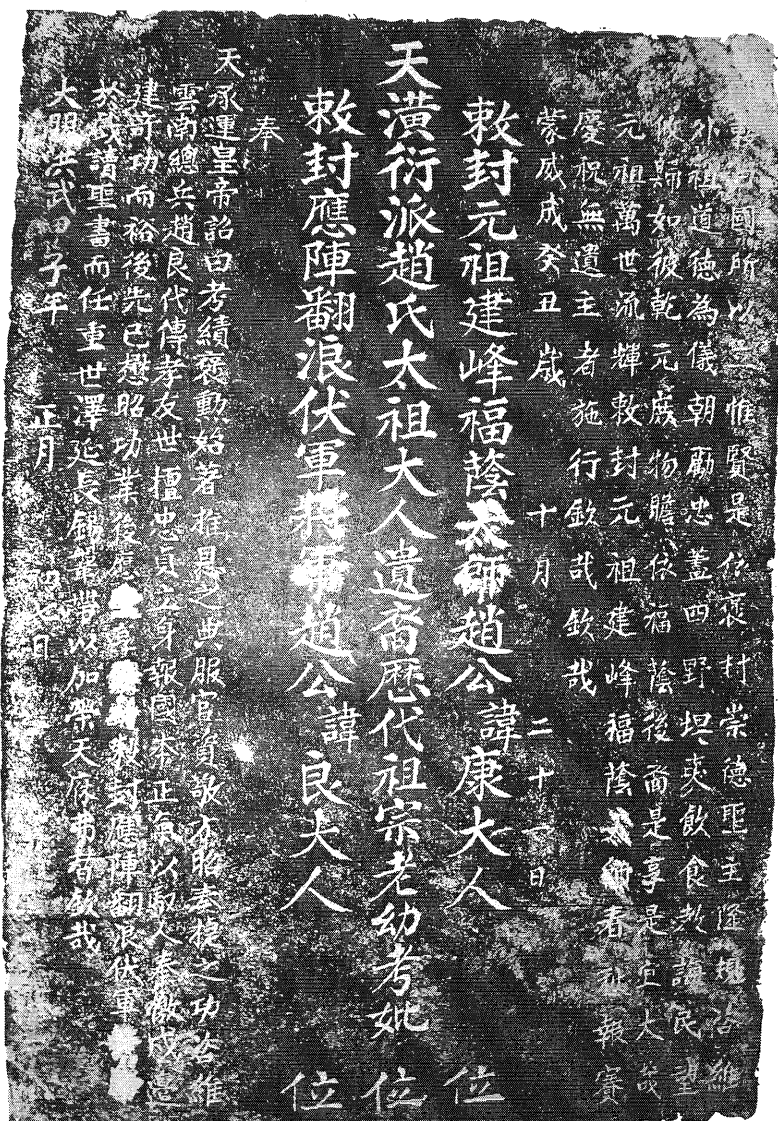


Figure 4.2 The stele Zhaoshi zongci bei, found in the Zhao-surname ancestral hall, recording the early history of the Zhao surname and King Cheng Gepei's decree of 713. Source: Yang 1991, 14.

of sacrifice had to do with the emergence of Zhao Liang, who was given honour equal to that accrued to the primordial ancestor.

While the territorial god, Zhao Kang, was being absorbed into the ancestral hall, the lineage as an institution was being grafted onto the Zhao-surnamed

community. All the while, at the village, Zhao Kang was still worshipped as a village god, and his story was told and retold with vivid and dramatic detail. Additionally, descendants of Zhao Kang who had accepted office with the new Ming would have had occasion to produce a genealogy, possibly in writing, for which they would have turned to the common descent that had been built around Zhao Kang as a god and the primordial ancestor. The lineage, which traced ancestry through direct descent rather than common kinship or surname, was therefore very much a construct introduced by people who took official positions within the Ming state. The recognition given Zhao Kang in the imperial decree not as a god but as an ancestor required downplaying the subplot involving the adoption of a son found at Jian Peak, even though the essay by Dong Xian recording the legend of the god was written at almost the same time as the ancestral hall was built.

Ancestor as Official and as Shaman

Although Dong Xian's essay of 1409 traces the origin of the Zhao surname of Dali to Jian Peak and the primordial ancestor Zhao Kang, many gravestone inscriptions dating to the Ming dynasty record a different ancestry. Two ancestors, in particular, are commonly cited on gravestones: Zhao Duoxie or his descendant Zhao Yongya. Duoxie was the military governor of Kainan prefecture located to the southwest of Yunnan. He was sent by the Nanzhao king to search for sacred sites left by Guanyin around Yunnan. He finally found his footprint on a mountain that was subsequently identified as a sacred site by the state. His story was recorded in the *Nanzhao Scroll*, painted around the ninth century (Lee 1967, 40-62). Zhao Duoxie is an important figure in the written genealogies and gravestone-stele inscriptions because of his official status. The second figure, Zhao Yongya, an acarye, was a remarkable ritual specialist of esoteric Buddhism who learned his magical skills from a holy monk from India and was much appreciated for these skills by his descendants. Yongya earned high esteem and status through his esoteric ability to conduct state rituals. He specialized in summoning serpents, taming tigers, and praying for rain.

The history of the lineage descending from Zhao Duoxie and Zhao Yongya may be traced in several Zhao-surname genealogies compiled by branches of the lineage settled at Longguan, Taqiao, and Xizhou (see Figure 4.3). However, for the individual gravestone steles of these different branches, they adopted different focal ancestors, either Zhao Duoxie to emphasize the dead's official position or Zhao Yongya to strengthen the legitimacy of the esoteric religious power of his descendants. Three written genealogies, which were found in

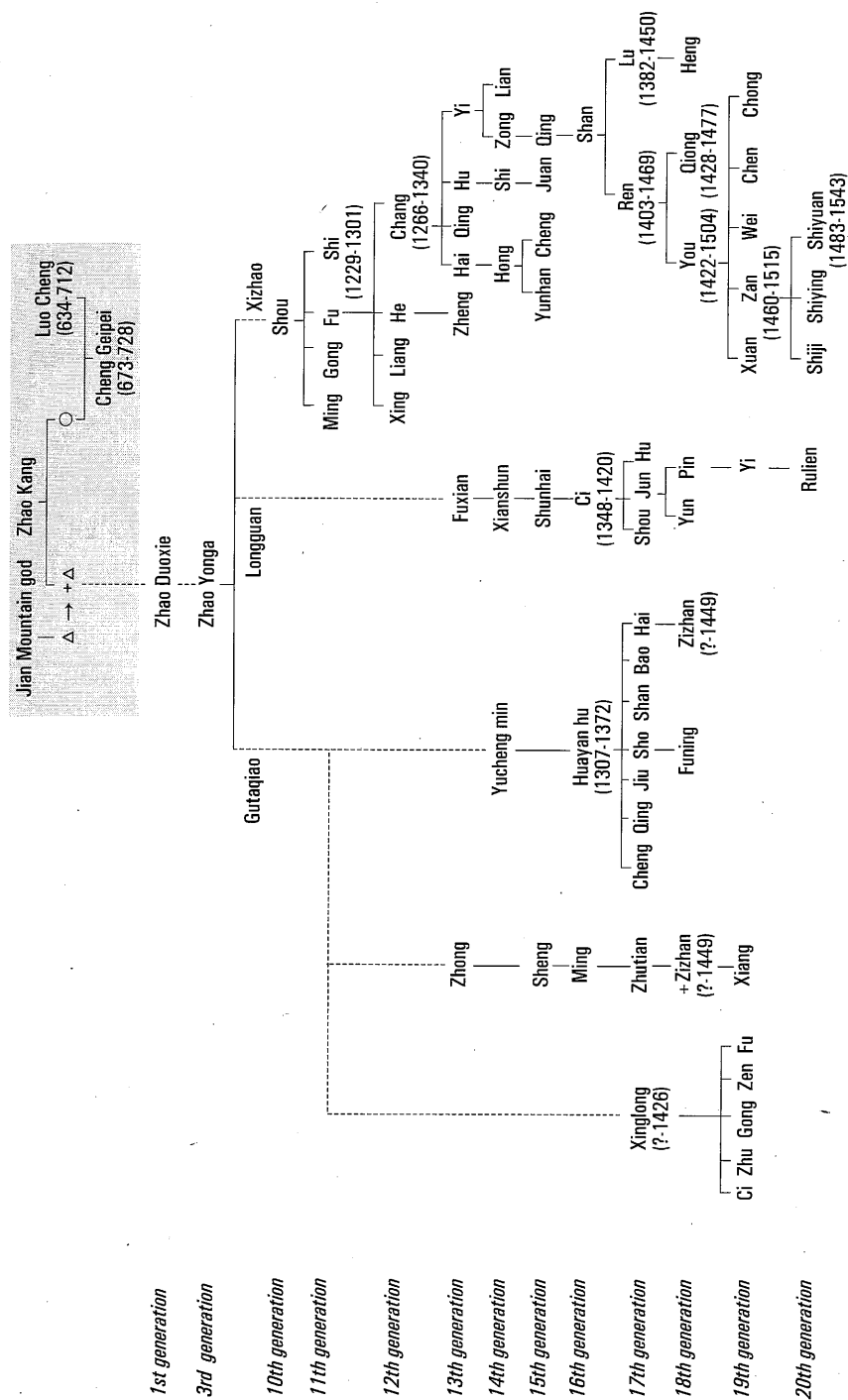


Figure 4.3 A Zhao-surname genealogy

Longguan, Taqiao, and Xizhou, uncover how the Zhao people changed their status in reaction to state changes by adopting a proper ancestor.

In Longguan a written genealogy called *Taihe Longguan Zhaoshi zupu* (Genealogy of the Taihe Longguan Zhao surname) records the local version of the lineage, which was a product of the impact of the Ming dynasty rule. In Taqiao, near the royal Buddhist temple of the Dali king, the Zhao surname was obviously linked to an acarye lineage with a high-ranking position. There, a written genealogy called *Dali Gutaqiao Zhaoshi zupu* (Genealogy of the Dali Gutaqiao Zhao surname) records fictional ancestors of a military commander and a civil official from Nanjing. In Xizhou, which had been a royal city of the Dali kingdom, a written genealogy called *Zhaoshi zupu* (Genealogy of the Zhao Surname) records that the focal ancestor of people with the Zhao surname became Zhao Duoxie, who came from Nanjing. Each of these three written genealogies shows the historical reality of ancestors who had either official or shaman positions, but because of the political changes of the Ming period, the writers of each manipulated some elements of the information about the ancestors as a means of maintaining the social status of the lineage under different political situations.

In the written genealogy of the Zhao surname in Longguan, there are four parts: the first part contains two articles written by imperial officials in 1462 and 1467 respectively, each recording the experiences of the families of the first three generations on the trip to Nanjing, the imperial capital of the early Ming state. The second part has two postscripts written by two famous local scholars who won imperial official positions: Zhao Rulian (1495-1570) and Lee Yunyang (1497-1580). The third part is a preface depicting the history of a branch that migrated to Jinning, in eastern Yunnan. The final part lists the names of the Longguan Zhao family's three branches and gives a record of their official credits.

The central idea of the preface of the Longguan genealogy was that kinship was set up by dharma (*fa*), not by bloodline. The section starts with an account of a genealogical relationship between the Zhao ancestors and esoteric Buddhism introduced from Middle India. It notes that the teachings and rituals of the acarye in Yunnan were all extracted from esoteric Buddhism founded by the primordial ancestor Buddha Dipamkara (Randeng Rulai), who gained enlightenment. Buddha Dipamkara passed his teachings to Buddha Sakyamuni, who passed them onto the kings of India and to Vajrayana master Brahmin (*jingang sheng shi poluomen*). The text also mentions a monk by the name of Mojietuo from Magadha in Middle India, who was a master of esoteric Buddhism and who brought his mission to the Dali area, where he instructed

a number of the local nobility in Buddhist teachings and in magic skills. Zhao Yongya, sometimes called Zhao Yong in alternative texts, the first acarye of people of the Zhao surname, was one of the followers (*Taihe Longguan Zhaoshi zupu* n.d., 1426 preface).

Written approximately a century after the Ming conquest, the 1462 preface of the Longguan branch's genealogy indicates that into the Ming, ritual skills increasingly defined the Zhao lineage. Until the Ming conquest, Zhao Yongya's descendants had held high positions as state ritual specialists. After the Ming conquest, when Yongya's descendant Zhao Ci (1348-1420) went to Nanjing to pay tribute and pledge his allegiance, he was also rewarded for his skill in conducting an exorcism at the imperial court. Ci returned to Yunnan with high honour and precious gifts from the emperor. His three sons inherited the family religious offices.

The eldest son, Shou (1362-1459), was invited to visit Nanjing when he was seventy-nine years old and was ordered to remain at the imperial court until he died at ninety-seven. The emperor bestowed on him the title of State Ritualist Acarye (*guoshi achili*). The second son, Jun (1362-?), had preceded his elder brother in paying tribute to the imperial court in 1383. He had gone in the company of the famous monk Wuji, and when he returned home, he inherited his father's position in Longguan. The third son, Hu, had accompanied his father on his visit to Nanjing and on his return, on the invitation of the magistrate of Jinning county, had tamed a serpent at Dianchi, the largest lake in eastern Yunnan. Thereafter, Hu and his offspring settled in Jinning (*Taihe Longguan Zhaoshi zupu* n.d., 1592 preface).

Likewise, in Taqiao, the genealogy shows that before 1450, the Zhao surname was famous for its religious status. The grave stele inscription written for Zhao Xinglong (d. 1426), preserved in the genealogy, recorded that his ancestors inherited the Yoga esoteric teachings (*yujia aodian*), which had been handed down in the family from generation to generation. Xinglong himself was a monk, but he served in the Ming officialdom, reaching the post of salt distribution commissioner (*yanyunshi*) of Guangdong before he died at his post (*Dali Gutaqiao Zhaoshi zupu* 1992, 130-31).⁵ Another grave-stele inscription, dated 1449 and written for Zhao Zizhan, recorded that Zizhan's great-grandfather Sheng was a state ritualist who had held the office for the royal family of Dali kingdom and that his father had inherited the esoteric teachings. Zhao Zizhan held appointed state posts in Suzhou and Guangdong and then eventually died in Shandong province (*Dali Gutaqiao Zhaoshi zupu* 1992, 131). At Xizhou, although people of the Zhao surname claimed that their focal ancestor had come from Nanjing, a gravestone stele recorded a family of

esoteric Buddhist masters. A member of the family was Zhao Fuhui, who had moved from Longguan in the thirteenth century and was an acarye followed by three descending generations of acarye (Yang 1991, 35-36).

The concept of ancestor played dual roles in terms of religious and political status, both of which were related to the legitimacy of the state. The reactions of the three branches of the Zhao clan to the political impact of the early Ming period were very similar and conveyed a local perspective of social change. They practised native religious values in their local society, especially in the maintenance of gravestone-stele records as a means of assuring the continuity of an identity for themselves. But in other ways, the new political situation pulled their political identity far away to the capital, Nanjing, which was always recorded in written genealogies. The esoteric Buddhist masters endeavoured to adjust themselves to the management and control of the Ming state, especially during the very beginning of the Ming conquest. Some of them were sent to Nanjing to serve at court, some were assigned to support the administrative bureaucracy, and others were even incorporated into the regular military. This adjustment by the Buddhist masters occurred because, before Confucian schools became widely established and imperial examinations were held in Dali, the way to maintain noble status, regardless of whether the indigenous people were willing or reluctant, was to serve the state and preserve the new official status within the lineage. This experience of people with the Zhao surname may be compared to that of people with the famous Dong surname, who also comprised a dominant religious clan. The clan was organized into a household registration (*lijia*) system. One of the family members who served as a local headman of a group of households was summoned to Nanjing to build a ship. For this work, he won an imperial title from the state and died in Nanjing (*Dali Shicheng Dongshi zupu* 1921, 7). Due to this service, his descendants in Dali were able to inherit his imperial title, thus maintaining their status as nobility locally.

These genealogical accounts of the Zhao clan give the impression that the branch at Longguan provided ritual service at court to gain status under the new system. Other branches, at Taqiao and Xizhou, remained in Dali, where their members served as local shamans. Descendants of Zhao Yongya, the ritual keeper of Dali, continued to exercise their religious prowess in Longguan, Taqiao, and Xizhou. Yet, just as dramatic as court ritual service, this local service might have provided the lineage with its defining touch in the early Ming. However, approximately four generations into the Ming dynasty, around 1500, the claims of people with the Zhao surname to a special hereditary status as ritual specialists ceased to receive imperial recognition.

Instead of continuing to sustain their superior status through ritual specialization, descendants were ready to change the claim to maintain their social status by adopting a new identity from the orthodoxy of the state. They began to sit for the official examinations to gain official status within the Ming bureaucracy. With this development, the lineage history of the Zhao surname as it was recorded in written genealogies also changed.

Under the new situation, the local values of religious and political status disintegrated. Zhao Yi (1461-1529) of the Longguan branch, one of Zhao Jun's sons, was among the first to earn a degree by examination. He became an instructor (*xuezheng*) at the prefecture level in Sichuan and, in 1521, was promoted to judge of the metropolitan prefecture (*yingtianfu tuiguan*). His son, Rulian, became organizer of the civil appointments process (*wenxuan zhushi*), Hanlin Bachelor (Hanlin shujishi), and eventually assistant director of the Office of the Vice Censor-in-Chief of Nanjing (Nanjing you fuduyushi xieguan yuanshi). Gaining official status in Nanjing was particularly important for their descendants, especially as it became a symbol when they returned to their home county. Rulian compiled the first genealogy for the Longguan branch in the standard Chinese genealogical style, and his experience is instructive of some of the cultural changes that had come about. He started by collecting the genealogical information on grave inscriptions in the ancestral graveyard, all except for a few steles on which he found unreadable incantations written in Sanskrit characters (Liebenthal 1947). Not being able to read Sanskrit, he gave up and turned to interviewing the elderly and searching for family documents. He noted the change when he said, "Our ancestral teachings have vanished. Now we have become increasingly cultivated [like the Chinese]. But the big families in the interior [meaning central China] are no more than this" (*Taihe Longguan Zhaoshi zupu* n.d.). This statement indicated Rulian's subtle unease about the loss of the Zhao family's glorious history and the cultural transformation taking place.

Whatever Rulian's observations regarding the diminished importance of ancestral teachings, it is unlikely that the traditional value put on ritual knowledge disappeared. More likely, official titles were now at a premium, as indicated in the genealogical practice of referring to deceased members of the lineage by their titles.

The Vanishing Past and the Mythological History

Along with the acquisition of official degrees, toward the second half of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth, another genealogical legend gained ascendance: the legend of Nine Noble Clans (Jiulongzu),

sometimes rendered in a corrupted translation as Nine Dragon Clans. According to this legend, the descendants of Dali noble families living at Xizhou (many surnamed Dong, Duan, Zhao, Lee, Zhang, Yang, or Ho) are descended from a woman by the name of Sayi of the Ailao people (Ailao yi). Both the legend and Sayi may be traced to an assertion in the *History of the Eastern Han* that the southwest barbarians (*manyi*) were descended from Sayi, a woman who one day was impregnated by a piece of driftwood that was actually a dragon. She gave birth to ten sons, called the Nine Dragon brothers. When the brothers grew up, they married ten sisters, and thereafter their flourishing descendants became the ancestors of the people of the southwest, as recorded by Fan Ye (398-445) (Fan 1979, 2848). When the Nanzhao king sent his ambassador to the Tang court, he claimed that they were Ailao people and used this ancestral connection to the Nine Dragon myth to identify his people (Fan 1998, 11-12; Shi 1996).

The Nine Dragon myth became entwined with Buddhist legends about Asoka. This myth is included in the thirteenth-century *A Record on the Origins of Ancient Yunnan* (Zhang 1981) and in the even earlier undated *Ancient Complete Record of the Bai* (*Baigu tongji* 1996). As the myth goes, when Asoka's three sons were sent to Yunnan to pursue a horse, the third son married the legendary figure Sayi and fathered the Nine Dragon brothers. The Nine Dragon brothers became the ancestors of the Buddhist kings of Nanzhao and nearby states, including Turfan (Tibet), Han (the Chinese state), Shizigou (Sri Lanka), Jiaozhi (Vietnam), and Baiyi (around Xishuangbanna in Yunnan) (*Baigu tongji* 1996, 52). This version was possibly a tradition indigenous to Dali since it not only shared the same theme of the Nine Dragon myth but also included within the names of the nine sons the Nanzhao royal surname Meng (Yang 1998, 5; Yang 2001, 756). In the later years of the Nanzhao kingdom, the legend had possibly been instrumental in equating the Nanzhao kings with their brother sovereigns (Lian 2006).

However, some time between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the context of the Nine Dragon Clans changed as they expanded to include the noble families of the Dali kingdom. As recorded by the *Nanzhao Informal History* (*Nanzhao yeshi*) of 1549, Sayi gave birth to ten sons, who gave rise to ten big surnames, including Duan, Li, Yang, Zhao, Zhang, and Dong, of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms (Yang 1998, 4-5). Correspondingly, the grave-stele inscriptions, too, declared that the big surnames belonged to the Nine Dragon Clans. In the case of the Zhao surname, two grave-stele inscriptions, dated 1449 and 1472 respectively, record that the descendants of the esoteric Buddhist ritualists Zhao Nu and Zhao Xian belonged to the Nine Noble peoples (Jiulongren) or the Nine Noble Clans (Jiulongzu) (Yang 1991, 47-60).

Comparing the context of the Nine Noble Clans in local texts before the fifteenth century with the grave-stele inscriptions after the Ming conquest, we may discern a subtle but ambiguous change regarding collective identity. The established surnames from the Dali kingdom had collectively acknowledged that their origins might be merged into Chinese history, but at the same time, this history reaffirmed their marginal status in the Chinese imperial state. Reconciling Dali genealogies with orthodox Chinese history became a thorny issue for local identity. Some focal ancestors had to be qualified or even altered. In a time of flux when some members of the Zhao lineage went to Confucian schools and became Ming officials, they might even have ceased to claim that they were included among the Nine Dragon peoples. This is especially evident in the use of either the locations of the offices held or the locations where the offices were awarded, such as Nanjing, which downplayed native places as identified through the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms. When claims were made of an ancestral link to the Nine Dragon myth, they denoted a sense of nostalgia for the past rather than an attempt to establish legitimacy.

Becoming Officials, Becoming Nanjing People

Changes in the claims to the Nine Dragon ancestry might be related to two Ming dynasty administrative policies. In the Dali area, as in many parts of China, the Ming government imposed *lijia* household registration at the same time that it enhanced the status of Confucian scholars.

Documentation of the subsequent changes in the status system is available in the written genealogies. What passes for a Chinese genealogy (*zupu* or *jiapu*), it should be noted, is a virtual lineage or family archive. Such a record includes, aside from the family tree, prefaces from extant and earlier editions, gravestone inscriptions, imperial edicts announcing the award of official positions to lineage members, and miscellaneous daily usage texts such as funeral oration, couplets, messages of congratulation for social life, and isolated religious texts. Together, these documents give an impression of the social image that people of the lineage sought to project.

In Xizhou, Zhao Rulian wrote the gravestone stele for Zhao Shiyuan (1483-1544), Zhao Zan's son. He wrote an unusual statement at the beginning of the stele, which related their ancestry to the time and place at which Chinese state orthodoxy established itself, the Qin dynasty (221-6 BC). The motivation is very subtle but very clear if we go more deeply into the family history since Zhan Zan (1460-1515). No claims were made for origin from the Nine Dragons after Zhao Zan. Zhao Zan undertook the imperial examination and secured appointment as a county instructor (*jiaoyu*) in Sichuan (*Zhaoshi zupu* n.d.,

12-14). In the following generations, several stipendiary students (*xiangsheng*) followed, indicating the Zhao family's established place within the scholarly tradition. This standing meant that Zhao Zan's achievement and his political position allowed the lineage to claim official status. As a result of Zhao Zan's effort, the Zhao-surname genealogy could record, among the honorific awards presented to the lineage and possibly dating from the time of Zan's examination success, congratulatory epithets announcing that "the family had achieved official status" (*keyuan shijia*) or that it had been "honoured by achieving official status" (*shiji baobiao*) (*Zhaoshi zupu* n.d. 7, 22-24).

In Longguan, Zhao Hu had been entered into the household register (*zhanji*) and achieved official status, while Zhao Yi, grandson of Hu's brother, Jun, had served as a judge of the metropolitan prefecture, had likewise achieved official status. Yi's senior official position had ensured that his sons and grandsons, by imperial grace (*tuien*), were eligible to attend the Confucian school and take advantage of the opportunity to sustain their official status by sitting for the official examination. The grave inscription for Zhao Rulian, another of Yi's sons, written by the famous native scholar Li Yuanyang (1497-1580), could now make a bid for an origin with an even stronger connection to the Ming government than that afforded by association with the Nine Dragons. It was recorded that Zhao Rulian's ancestors had hailed from no other origin than Nanjing itself, the imperial capital. Their early ancestor, Zhao Yongya, had travelled to Yunnan in the Yuan from Nanjing and secured land in Longguan. Descendants of noble families who gained a new status as scholar-officials now downplayed their history as originating in Nanzhao or Dali (Fang 2003, 35-38), as this local history was no longer a means of maintaining noble status.

Earlier than Li Yuanyang, at Taqiao, Zhao Shou had already introduced Nanjing ancestors into the genealogy. In a preface to his genealogy, Zhao Shou had written that his grandfather originated from Nanjing, attended the imperial examination there, and even earned a metropolitan graduate (*jinshi*) degree. Shou himself also passed the provincial examination and was granted a provincial graduate (*juren*) degree in 1414. Zhao Shou's brother-in-law, Yang Xi, who contributed a genealogy preface dated 1454, also repeated the Nanjing affiliation.

However, the Buddhist past was not yet completely lost. The grave inscriptions found in the Zhao-surname ancestral graveyard, located to the north of the Wuwei Temple, which had been a royal Buddhist temple for Dali kings, records the names of two ancestors by their household names, Yucheng Min and Huayan Hu. These two were high-ranking esoteric Buddhists who had protected the clan of the Dali king Duan. Yucheng and Huayan were names

for the Buddha. It had been a custom in the Dali kingdom for the nobility to adopt a name for the Buddha as their middle name. The grave stele even reported that local people still recalled Huayen Hu's adept esoteric skills and treated him with deep respect. Zhao Shou was a son of Huayen Hu. As indicated by the grave inscription, Zhao Shou's grandfather could hardly have originated in Nanjing.

Yet, by the end of the sixteenth century, it became common for Dali natives to claim Nanjing ancestry. Since that time, scholars have focused their research on Ming military migration from Nanjing in efforts to understand how this migration might have influenced the structure of local society in Yunnan. There might well have been some migration from Nanjing, but the genealogical enterprise suggests that many claims to the Nanjing origin might have been no more than claims.

Conclusion

Reconstructing a relationship and ensuring status through meaningful figures, no matter whether these figures were territorial gods or ancestors, was a dynamic process used by people to create an identity for themselves within Erhai society. In this most literate place on the periphery of southwest China, it is understandable that the ancestral stories of the past were preserved at the village level and that the Confucian official titles given by the state were located on the gravestone steles. Under such multiple recognitions of the past, the negotiable nature of group identification is significant. From this perspective, we gain a better appreciation of the historical context of ethnic groups in southwest China and of the dialogue between the periphery and the state that occurred in the discourse ancestors built up through either ethnic or lineage formation.

In the Erhai surroundings, between 1450 and 1550, genealogical claims to an aristocratic origin dropped out of favour, and the genealogies instead argued for an origin that was linked to the Chinese state. Before 1550, the people in the Erhai area did not recognize themselves as Han Chinese. People of the Zhao surname, for instance, traced their lineage from ancestors who were close to the Dali royal court. Between the mid-fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries, however, as the Ming dynasty government promoted household registration and education, local people were drawn into the government bureaucracy, and those with the Zhao surname subscribed to the belief that their ancestors had not only visited Nanjing but had also originated from there. Two genealogical narratives resulted from this development. Even today, in the villages, people retell the stories of the early ancestors to visitors, infusing the stories with full local flavour, and they take them to

the village temples, where the ancestors are still worshipped. Time stands still in this narrative, the magical powers of the ancestors are related to the spirits of the surrounding land forms (e.g., the mountain god or river spirits), and origins are drawn from kings and nobility. A systematic catalogue of ancestors arrayed in a genealogical pattern details the relationships of different groups of living people. However, in contrast to the oral tradition, the written genealogies detail a succession of origin stories that bring the lineage progressively nearer the Ming imperial state. As ancestral names are recorded in writing, generation by generation, they sharply demarcate the subgrouping of people within the lineage who might exclusively, as descendants, share in the status and benefits bestowed on individual ancestors by the imperial state. The stories now relate not only to the ancestors who negotiated with the forces of nature in the founding of the lineage but also to those who by their achievement gained imperial recognition. The shamans of the old order give way, in this context, to the imperial officials, and as a result, the descendants of the Dali aristocrats – later known as the Bai – appear more and more Han.

Glossary

<i>acarye (achili)</i>	阿叱力	<i>guoshi</i>	國師
Bai	白	<i>guoshi achili</i>	國師阿叱力
Baizu	白族	Gutaqiao	古塔橋
Bairen	白人	Hanlin shujishi	翰林庶吉士
<i>Baigu tongji</i>	白古通記	<i>Houhanshu</i>	後漢書
<i>baiwen</i>	白文	Huayan Hu	華嚴護
Baiya	白崖	<i>Jigu dianshuoianshuo</i>	紀古滇說原集
Baiyi	白夷	<i>yuanjiji</i>	
Cheng Gepei	盛閣陂	Jianfeng	建峰
Dali	大理	<i>jiaoyu</i>	教諭
<i>Dali Gutaqiao</i>	大理古塔橋趙氏族譜	Jiaozhi	交趾
<i>Zhaoshi Zupu</i>		<i>jiapu</i>	家譜
<i>Dali Shicheng</i>	大理史城董氏族譜	<i>jingang sheng shi</i>	金剛乘師波羅門
<i>Dongshi Zupu</i>		<i>poluomen</i>	
Dianchi	滇池	Jinning	晉寧
Dong Xian	董賢	<i>jinshi</i>	進士
Duan Chicheng	段赤誠	<i>Jiulongren</i>	九隆人
Erhai	洱海	<i>Jiulongzu</i>	九隆族
<i>fa</i>	法	<i>jizu</i>	祭祖
Guanyin	觀音	<i>juren</i>	舉人
<i>guizhu</i>	鬼主	<i>keyuan shijia</i>	科員世家

Li Yuanyang	李元陽	Yanyun shi	鹽運使
lijia	里甲	yingtianfu tuiguan	應天府推官
Longguan	龍關	Yinzhen fanlang	應陣翻浪伏軍將軍
manyi	蠻夷	fujun jiangjun	
Minjia	民家	yuanzu	元祖
mingjia daxing	名家大姓	Yuanzu Jianfeng	元祖建峰福蔭大師
Mojietuo	摩揭陀	fuyin dashi	
Nanjing you	南京右副都御史協官院事	Yucheng Min	榆城旻
fuduyushi		yujia aodian	瑜珈奧典
xieguan yuanshi		zaijia seng	在家僧
Nanzhao	南詔	zhanji	占籍
Nanzhao tujian	南詔圖卷	Zhao Bao	趙寶
Nanzhao yeshi	南詔野史	Zhao Ci	趙賜
Randeng Rulai	燃燈如來	Zhao Duoxie	趙鐸些
Sayi	沙壹	Zhao Fuhui	趙福惠
sengguan	僧官	Zhao Hu	趙護
shiji baobiao	仕籍褒表	Zhao Jun	趙均
Shizigou	獅子國	Zhao Kang	趙康
Taihe Longguan	太和龍關趙氏族譜	Zhao Liang	趙良
Zhaoshi zupu		Zhao Nu	趙帑
tanzu	壇主	Zhao Rulian	趙汝濂
Taqiao	塔橋	Zhao Sheng	趙生
tuien	推恩	Zhao Shou	趙壽
tun	屯	Zhao Tai	趙泰
tusi	土司	Zhao Xian	趙賢
tuzhu	土主	Zhao Xinglong	趙興隆
waizu	外祖	Zhao Yi	趙儀
wenxuan zhushi	文選主事	Zhao Yongya	趙永牙
Wufengshan	五峰山	Zhao Zan	趙瓚
Wuji	無極	Zhao Zizhan	趙子瞻
Wuwei Temple	無為寺	Zhaoshi zongci bei	趙氏宗祠碑
xiangsheng	庠生	Zhaoshi zupu	趙氏族譜
Xishuangbanna	西雙版納	zongbing	總兵
Xizhou	喜洲	zu	祖
xuezheng	學正	zupu	族譜
Yang Xi	楊璽		

Notes

- 1 "Baizu" has been used as the name of an ethnic group since the 1950s. Before that time, from as early as the thirteenth century, "Bai" or "Bairen" was widely used in local documents to describe the descendants of the Bai king or the aristocracy of the Dali kingdom. From the late Ming, together with the founding of military settlements populated mainly by outsiders, the people in Dali gradually were recorded as "Minjia." In this chapter, the "Bai people" refers to the aristocracy of the Dali kingdom and their descendants under Ming rule.
- 2 The Bai written language uses Chinese characters partly as a syllabary and partly as loan words. There is some controversy about the time of the origin of the Bai written language. At the latest, it came into use during the Dali kingdom, by at least the middle of the twelfth century, and remained in use up to the seventeenth century. From as early as the fourteenth century, many of the sources originally written in Bai had been translated into Chinese. Notable examples are Yang (1998), *Baigu tongji* (2001), and *Baiguo yinyou* (Giyun 2002). Moreover, in the sixteenth century, Yang (1936) collected and reorganized the Bai written-language materials into a history of the Bai kingdom.
- 3 The story was recorded in different versions. One of the main sources was a surviving scroll painting from 899 entitled *Nanzhao tuzhuan* (*The Nanzhao Painted Scroll*), which depicts the legalization of the Nanzhao kingship. The scroll vividly depicts stories of a Brahmin monk who was described as the patron of the Nanzhao kingdom and was also equated with the Buddhist bodhisattva Guanyin (Lee 1982). Another version claimed that the Nanzhao king was the descendant of the Buddhist king Asoka (Zhang 1981). The representation of Guanyin as a male figure was quite common in the Dali Kingdom.
- 4 The oldest gravestone stele recorded in the Zhao-surname genealogies of Xizhou and Gutaqiao dates from the Yuan dynasty. See *Zhaoshi zupu* (n.d.) and *Dali Gutaqiao Zhaoshi zupu* (1992).
- 5 At the beginning of Ming dynasty rule, Emperor Taizu encouraged the local elite, mostly those who owned land and property, to act as tax collectors for the state within the local community. The line of authority that was created within the community rendered the state effective at the local level at this early stage of Ming rule. During this period, the state honoured and promoted members of the local elite as state officials without requiring them to sit the imperial examination (Liang 2008, 25-28, 31-60). Emperor Taizu also selected young men from Yunnan, including descendants of former chieftains, to go to the capital, Nanjing, to be students of the Imperial Academy (Mu and Mu 1999, 94-97). In Dali, although much remains unclear about the imposition of tax collection during the Ming, local documents demonstrate that household registration (*lijia*) and its effect on tax collection impacted both the nobility and social mobility.

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