ONE

INTRODUCTION

This work seeks to explain the development of an important provincial society, the Xiangyang 襄陽 region (in modern northern Hubei province), and the terms on which its members interacted with representatives of the southern court at Jiankang 建康 in the fifth and sixth centuries CE. It responds to the shortcomings of models of aristocracy and oligarchy, which have been applied to the social system of early medieval China, by demonstrating that a model based on patronage is far more helpful in understanding the tremendous instability of the political system, and the process of recruitment and assimilation of provincial leaders. It is the central thesis of this work that patronage is the most useful model with which to understand the general political organization of the southern dynasties.

The work further seeks to understand the effect of patronage on local society and local culture. On this issue it responds to prior efforts to characterize local society as a fairly integrated community, one in which local elites developed a protective, nurturant community ethos, and for which local men felt a significant sense of loyalty and identity. This idea is put to the test and found wanting. Instead, the evidence suggests that local society was extremely fragmented, with loyalties directed at narrowly defined familial ties or social subgroups. This fragmentation was perpetuated and accentuated by the patronage system, which persistently drew men's loyalties up and out of their communities and into the affairs of imperial patrons; it also transmitted the fierce succession rivalries of the imperial court into local affairs.

Despite this fragmentation, the culture of the Xiangyang region nonetheless had distinctive features which made it quite different from the culture of Jiankang, though the latter is often taken to be representative of "the south" in general. These features include the routine use of physical violence in one's career and personal life; the importance of revenge and personal honor; the lack of much classical education, even of basic literacy, among society's leading members; and an oral culture based on song, dance, and musical

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accompaniment. This regional culture lacked formal literary expression, and was not a basis for an abstract, impersonal identity or loyalty. Nonetheless, it affected the mutual perception between local men and Jiankang elites, who came from a very different cultural milieu. In depicting a provincial culture of this type, this work challenges prevailing notions of what "southern" culture was, notions that are overwhelmingly based on the writings of men from the Jiankang elite and their cultural satellites.

ARISTOCRACY AND OLIGARCHY

The society of early medieval China has proven difficult to generalize about.[1] The period has been described as "aristocratic," but there has been considerable debate about how to characterize this "aristocracy," or whether one really existed at all. At one end of the spectrum, scholars have highlighted officeholding and status bestowed by the state as the hallmarks of the ruling class; the term *oligarchy* has also been applied to this formulation, especially for the Tang dynasty elite.[2] Evidence from the eastern Jin (317–420) and southern dynasties (420–589), however, shows that very few families proved able to retain high status and wide-scale political power for more than a few generations; this rapid rate of turnover does not support the idea of a small, self-perpetuating social and political elite that the term *oligarchy* implies.[3] Inheritable titles and officeholding alone were apparently not sufficient to stabilize the social order into hereditary classes to any great degree.

In the case of the southern dynasties, the difficulty with these formulations stems from the fact that the terminology addresses far too narrow a conception of what early medieval "society" was. Scholars have tended to focus exclusively on the cluster of family lines that were based at the southern capital, Jiankang. Men of these families were noted for their official service and their education and scholarship in classics, histories, and Buddhist materials; the most prestigious of them frequently supplied consorts to the imperial household. Most of these family lines initially secured their status immediately following their migration south to support the eastern Jin court at Jiankang following the collapse of the western Jin court at Luoyang in the early fourth century. Some "southern lineages" that were already prominent in the Yangzi delta area were begrudgingly admitted to this circle over the following century. The core of this urban official class was well established prior to 420, though some, notably the Lanling Xiaos 蘭陵蕭, were relative latecomers. Though there was substantial turnover at the highest levels, this core group of families had considerable longevity in official service for well over two centuries.[4]

Under the southern courts, however, the imperial throne and the top ranks of the military were commonly occupied, not by representatives of these "aristocratic" lineages, but by lower-class men from more distant provinces.

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Such men were classed as *hanmen* 寒門, literally "cold gates," a term that suggested a household that lived in relative deprivation and poverty, and was used to signify any family that was not of the top rank of the officially privileged, genteel (*shizu* 士族) class. The term was especially appropriate for men from frontier provinces, since the term *han* could also signify the "barbarian" north and the frontier, from whence came the cold winds, both literally and metaphorically. Provincial men were not necessarily poor, however, nor was their social status always low; though they were looked down upon by the capital elite, they eventually came to hold most of the reins of actual power. In fact, men from the aristocratic lineages of the capital have been characterized as little but "props on a stage," who served at the behest of these provincials and lent them some cultural legitimacy.[5] In order to understand the political and social system of the southern dynasties, therefore, we must broaden our concept of the ruling class beyond the confines of the Jiankang elite, and attempt to write history from the perspective of these frontier *hanmen*, their provincial societies, and how they interacted with the court.

Once we adopt this broader concept of the medieval social order, the shortcomings of the more narrowly formulated models of aristocracy and oligarchy become glaringly apparent. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the provincial *hanmen* is their extraordinarily rapid turnover in the halls of power. Fighting men from the provinces rose quickly to great heights of authority, and often fell from grace even more rapidly. The relatively fixed, stable social order predicted by the model of an aristocracy or oligarchy is clearly not helpful for understanding this process. We must find another model.

COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY

The concept of local community suggests a much more promising approach to the study of provincial society. The other end of the spectrum of debate about the medieval "aristocracy" adopts this focus, emphasizing the social role of elite families in their local communities. Scholars have characterized these families both economically, as dominating local areas through ownership of extensive manorial estates, and ideologically, as promoting an ideal of close-knit community leadership through ethical modeling and charitable giving, thereby developing a "warm and protective" relationship with the local populace.[6] The economic side of the model is widely accepted, though evidence in this study suggests that, at least in the Xiangyang area, local families were not very extended nor necessarily very well entrenched.[7] The ideological side of the model, however, has been criticized for being too accepting of elite propaganda, and underemphasizing the likelihood of class struggle within such communities.[8]

A more serious problem with the ideological side of the model is that the evidence from early medieval texts does not support it very well. Though

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selected passages in medieval texts do portray local elites as engaging in local charitable and leadership activities, the broader corpus of local writing in this period does not emphasize this role.[9] The development of local history, for example, shows that local elites portrayed themselves, not as local leaders and patrons, but as detached from any concrete leadership role in local society. Medieval biographies of "retired gentlemen" who were resident in their communities (rather than at court) celebrate their disengagement from virtually all social or political concerns and their avoidance of local commoners. These accounts acknowledge only limited local ties to close family members; the most important, most deeply felt relationships are identified as being with equally erudite and disengaged men from far distant regions.[10] This evidence suggests that local elites did not seek to build their reputations through celebrating their fulfillment of civic leadership obligations, whatever their local activities may have been in practice.

An alternative approach to the ideology of local community is available from studies of modern nationalism and identity. These emphasize community as something that is "created" or "imagined" by human will in order to influence political behavior. This "imagining" draws on a variety of differences between one local society and another—in language, dress, physical appearance, residence, employment habits, cultural activities, shared history, etc.—which are accentuated by local elites in order to develop a stronger sense of cultural and political identity among their potential followers.[11] Cultural differences that had existed as a relatively nonpoliticized "soft" boundary of sentiment or habit can thereby evolve into a "hard" boundary, a commitment that commands loyal action and even sacrifice.[12] Such communities are by definition exclusive: their members are more likely to associate and ally with other members of their community, and reject, or at least subordinate, relationships with people from outside the community. The clear delineation of outsiders, and restrictions on accepting them as "members," is a central element in what constitutes a "hard" community identity. Texts that advocate and celebrate the values of such a community are likely to describe the corresponding restriction of political choices for community members as morally proper and "loyal."

Scholars have adapted these ideas to characterize the premodern development of Chinese cultural and national identity as a whole. Chinese culture has been characterized a type of universal "religious community," comparable to (for example) Islam; the development of a more restrictive Chinese national identity is then portrayed as developing out of this universal identity in response to external pressure, first from nomadic peoples beginning in the Song period (960–1279), then from Euro-American powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[13] Studies of the early medieval period have traced this "imagining" of a distinctive Chinese cultural identity back to

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the legacy of the Han empire, a legacy whose shadow fell heavily on the many lesser regimes that followed and sought to emulate it.[14]

Such universalist approaches to Chinese identity are of limited use for understanding *local* community, however, since they do not consider the ways in which the Han legacy became fragmented, and accommodated the development of important sub-identities. With the demise of the Han court and its domination of literary production, men from different geographical regions were more free to select from the Han corpus those elements that most emphasized and flattered their own homelands, and in this way could cast themselves as a unique "subset" of the classical whole. These locally particularistic interpretations of the Han tradition had the potential to be conceptualized as distinct cultures in and of themselves, and to serve as an important source of identity and affiliation for local elites, especially if promoted by institutions with substantial resources, such as regional kingdoms or local administrative units. Development along these lines is clearly visible, first as a result of the division during the Three Kingdoms period (220–280), and even more in the centuries-long division between northern and southern regimes (317–589).[15] Applied in this way, the "imagined community" model offers a promising approach to conceptualizing the ideological side of provincial community and identity in the early medieval period.

Compared to some other regions (notably Wu and Shu), the evidence from the Xiangyang region suggests that it was not a center for this sort of ideological production. Local writing from the Xiangyang region up through the late fourth century tended to subordinate local cultural identity to the larger Han universalist tradition, by anchoring local lore in classical references and antiquarian nostalgia; it also expressed a desire to see state representatives and other educated outsiders patronize the area and bring about a revival of the civilized traditions they had once maintained.[16] These materials promoted a soft, inclusive model of cultural identity that idealized the cultural production of the universal Han empire, reflecting the passive, disengaged, culturalist orientation of the late Han elite more generally.[17] By the end of the turbulent fourth century the members of this local "late Han elite" had all either died, sunk into obscurity, or emigrated to more congenial social and cultural centers such as Jiankang or Jiangling 江陵, the Jiankang court's primary administrative outpost in the middle Yangzi region. The legacy of their local writing remained as an antiquarian corpus to be clipped, edited, and rearranged at the behest of imperial agents and other outsiders with universalizing intentions.

The demise of Xiangyang's late Han elite opened the way in the fifth and sixth centuries for the development of a different sort of local society, which is the focus of this study. Centered on the military garrison that developed at Xiangyang, it became a critical source of military clients for powerful men

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from Jiankang and elsewhere. The population was extremely diverse, including many different immigrant settler groups, as well as locally born families engaged in military service or trade. The most challenging aspect of this society is that its members were largely illiterate; thus, despite its apparently vigorous oral and performative traditions, it did not develop any literary expression of an "imagined" shared history or culture.

For the modern-day researcher, the lack of literary production by local men means that their society can only be understood through the written observations of interested, but often unsympathetic outsiders. These sources are nonetheless quite valuable, and include accounts of the careers of local men; accounts of imperial princes or other officials who served as commanders of the garrison, or in their entourages; records of local oral song culture; records of local legends and stories; records of regional seasonal festivals; and archaeological evidence from local tombs. The evidence suggests that, by the mid-fifth century, the Xiangyang area had developed a distinctive cultural environment, characterized by violence, revenge, and a vibrant oral song culture. Sources from the sixth century reinforce this picture and add further evidence of the narrowness of familial ties, the importance of elite-sponsored public spectacles, and the relative indifference to Buddhism (at least in its scholarly, court-sponsored form). This distinctive local cultural mix existed in a state of significant tension with the quite different culture of Jiankang, a tension that is attested to both in imperial memorials and in local accounts of supernatural phenomena that outwit and drive away the evil agents of the southern regime.

The existence of this distinctive local culture does not mean that local men identified with this culture or with their birthplace in a way that determined their political actions, however; the evidence instead suggests that the "soft" boundaries remained soft. A certain amount of social cohesion, even exclusivity, does seem to have persisted among significant subgroups, especially clusters of immigrant settlers, and within quite narrowly conceptualized family circles. The very narrowness of these loyalties, however, exemplifies the lack of a wider conception of community identity. Evidence for broader local political cohesion peaks during the regime of Liu Jun 劉駿 (Song Emperor Xiaowu 宋孝武帝, r. 453–465). Subsequent to that time, though there is evidence that local men were occasionally resistant to political and cultural pressures emanating from the imperial court, the overwhelming majority of evidence shows that local men lacked a sense of abstract identity with "Xiangyang" that was anywhere near strong enough to determine their political behavior, their choices of allegiance, or their loyalty. They routinely served on opposing sides of wider civil conflicts, and showed no coordinated effort to work on behalf of local interests within the larger context of the southern regimes. Their "imaginations" were engaged elsewhere, on more proximate ties and

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narrower estimations of personal advantage. Thus, the model of the "imagined community," though suggestive for many other developments in medieval China, does not get us very far in this case.

PATRONAGE AS A SYSTEM

An approach that holds more promise for understanding the development of the political structure of provincial society at Xiangyang proves to be the idea of patronage, not just as a particular, personal relationship, but as a system of social relations. The operation of patron-client ties has already proven to be an especially fruitful approach to understanding the official culture of the eastern Han empire (25–220 CE).[18] Work on the southern dynasties has further demonstrated the importance of personal patronage ties in the relations between military garrison commanders and their men, and in the resultant rise of the provincial commoner class that largely displaced the aristocratic capital lineages in positions of substantive power.[19]

This body of research can be broadened to develop a model for the entire social system of the southern dynasties, one that offers tremendous insights into the nature of provincial society and its relations with the imperial court. Though patronage is commonly conceived of merely as a dyadic relationship between two individuals that is subordinate to, even parasitic on, a more formal social system, it can also be seen as the primary form of social relationship, one that structures the entire social order and its allocation of resources (especially official positions). This model predicts a society in which personal relationships are paramount; in which vertical ties routinely undercut and disrupt the development of stronger horizontal or "community" ties; in which issues of personal loyalty and trust are a matter of great concern, both in individual career choices and in the written literature; and in which society overall can be characterized as pluralistic, fluid, competitive, and inherently unstable.[20]

As a dyadic relationship, patronage is defined as a one-to-one bond between two individuals characterized by the following four elements:

1. personal, face-to-face contact;
2. *inequality*: the patron is of higher status, with more access to resources, than the client;
3. *reciprocity*: something is exchanged, i.e., loyal support for a job or a fief;
4. *voluntarism*: client and patron choose one another and are able to change allegiance.

Relationships of this sort are universal throughout human societies, but there is substantial variation in the extent to which they are routine and

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sanctioned as a means of exchanging resources.[21] For example, in societies with highly developed aristocratic or bureaucratic systems of status, patronage relations often have a subordinate and illegitimate role, and are denigrated as "corruption." Yet patronage relations can sometimes (as in ancient Rome) play a very legitimate role as a means of resource and power distribution within a more formal institutional matrix.[22] In these cases there is typically a well-developed (though not always explicitly stated) code of behavior for patrons and clients, including the responsibilities clients have to their patrons, the means by which they may shift from one patron to another, and whether they may have multiple patrons at once. Loyalty is a central issue, for while it is always in the patron's interest to restrict client choice by demanding a high degree of loyalty, it is often in the client's interest to retain freedom of choice in order to improve their bargaining position and thereby demand more from their patrons. Since patrons are ordinarily the more powerful and better educated members of society, they are the ones most likely to delineate ideals of loyalty, reflecting their own interests in criticizing breaches of loyalty and advocating the restriction of client choice to a single patron.[23]

As noted previously, scholarship on early medieval China strongly supports the idea that patron-client relations were important in determining political behavior, even though they were not always viewed favorably by political commentators. The terms used to describe clientelage relations are fairly continuous from the late Han all the way into the southern dynasties: they include terms such as guests (*ke* 客or *binke* 賓客), followers (*zuoyou* 左右), former officials (*guli* 古吏), students (*mensheng* 門生, usually reserved for educated clients), or simply "old contacts" (*jiu* 舊).[24] Such relationships were widely understood, but also considered somewhat less than ideal and often marginalized; thus, traditional Chinese historical writing does not necessarily use these terms regularly or consistently. Instead, personal ties of gratitude (*en* 恩) seem to have been implicit in almost any situation where a man accepted a job, a favor, or otherwise developed any type of unequal and reciprocal personal relationship with another. [25]

Because personal clientelage ties are by their very nature not systematically delineated in written materials, the most important tool for determining their role is prosopography, the mapping of networks of personal relationships.[26] In this research I have tracked evidence of marital ties, friendships and private associations, and especially career ties, about which there is the most surviving information. I have also looked for contexts in which such relationships could have formed, which has led me to institutional history, not just for what it tells us about formal social structure, but for what it tells us about informal ties, about which people were most likely to be thrown together and have opportunities to develop personal patronage relationships. I have paid particular attention to how men made choices of whom to serve and when

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to shift allegiance; I am less concerned with how loyalty was promoted as an abstract ideal, typically by patrons, than with how loyalty was observed in actual practice by men who were clients. In particular, I have sought to identify the extent to which loyalty to an ascribed or adopted identity—to family, local community, religion, or other ideology—may have guided men's choices, potentially limiting their choice of patrons, or at least gaining them censure when they chose "inappropriately."

Conceptualizing patronage not merely as a single relationship, but as the primary system of political relationships and resource allocation, allows us to further identify two broader characteristics of society. One of these is the prevalence of voluntary relationships over ascribed ties in determining political behavior, which inhibits the development of stable, regenerating, or inherited structures of power.[27] Such instability is the most prominent feature of the political system of the southern dynasties, one which the models of aristocracy and oligarchy cannot account for; by comparison, the patronage model predicts it. The evidence of Xiangyang men's particular experience confirms the model in much greater detail, for their career paths were highly personal and unstable. Ascriptive ties, especially to family, appear to have been much less significant than has been presumed based on studies of northern families, or the southern elite at Jiankang. Though ties to close male kin, primarily sons, brothers, nephews, sometimes first cousins, and occasional affinal kin, were clearly significant, there is little evidence of affiliation with more distant agnatic kin, or of the keeping of genealogical records tracking ancestors back for generations. In one particularly clear case, a Xiangyang man was introduced to a man of the same choronym and surname in the north and asked if they were related. The northerner was proud of his own illustrious surname, which he could trace back a dozen generations, but the Xiangyang man had no idea of his distant ancestors, and had to learn them from the genealogies his northern relatives had scrupulously maintained. In other words, the circle of ascriptive family ties he grew up with was relatively narrow; voluntary personal associations had been of far more significance to his career.[28]

The other important characteristic of a patronage system is the prevalence of vertical ties of solidarity over horizontal ones such as social class, status, ethnicity, or local or ideological identities. Horizontal ties would not be wholly absent, but they would be inhibited by the open competition for resources from patrons outside the community, and the resultant destabilizing effects of these vertical ties on community solidarity.[29] In other words, the potential for developing exclusive, politicized ties to an "imagined" community identity would be ceaselessly undercut by men's perennial quest for patrons from outside the community. Again, the evidence from Xiangyang supports the patronage model, for ties of place were exceptionally tenuous. The strongest "local" tie

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appears to have come through military service in the local garrison, but the evidence suggests that this was less an abstract ideological tie than a concrete personal one; men who fought side by side on military campaigns developed substantial personal bonds, which were then called upon for political purposes. Men's loyalties in any case were not primarily to their local associates and peers, but to their patrons, often imperial princes or other imperially appointed commanders of the garrison, who had the potential to deliver substantial wealth and prestigious appointments. In numerous examples of civil conflict, men served their patrons fiercely, fighting other men from their own locality to the death in order to maintain their clientelage bond.

Far from being an "imagined community" with a sense of shared identity and solidarity, Xiangyang society would be better described as highly fragmentary, as I emphasize particularly in chapter 3. Men's identity appears to have been very narrowly circumscribed to close relatives and personal associates; wider solidarities, to some "imagined" local community or cultural tradition, or to a dynasty or an ideal of universal cultural values, were largely absent. This is hardly surprising, given that most men from Xiangyang were illiterate; the "empire of the text" that existed in the Han classics, commentaries, and histories was largely beyond them, as was the option of fixing and propagating more proximate abstract identities through local history writing.[30] Indeed, as I argue in chapter 4, even local icons of bygone days were probably unknown to them; lacking strong extended family traditions, and without the ability to read local histories, or even local commemorative markers, they would have been of little significance. Such unconcern with "local" tradition may have been even more pronounced among immigrant settlers, who would have brought memories and traditions from diverse, even alien cultures, which they may have chosen to protect and preserve by avoiding more proximate associations.

In this highly fragmentary social world, personal clientelage ties to powerful patrons were the only means by which larger alliances could be forged. Powerful local men had personal clients and military retainers (*buqu* 部曲) of their own; they in turn developed allegiances to imperial princes and other outside agents who recruited them as personal clients.[31] This process joined men from different subgroups of local society, as well as men from other regions, into ad hoc personal coalitions of civilian staff and fighting men that survived as long as their patron did, and dispersed just as rapidly when he met his downfall. Beginning with Liu Jun (Song Emperor Xiaowu), men who sought to take the throne at Jiankang frequently relied on clients from the Xiangyang region; they were especially prominent in the regime of Xiao Yan 蕭衍 (Liang Emperor Wu 梁武帝, r. 502–549), but also in the regimes of Xiao Daocheng 蕭道成 (Qi Emperor Gao 齊高帝, r. 479–482) and Xiao Cha 蕭察 (later Liang Emperor Xuan 後梁宣帝, r. 555–562) and his heirs.

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REGIMES, REGIME CHANGE, AND OTHER NOMENCLATURE

The patronage model allows us to reconceptualize how we write about the political system of the imperial court itself. We must begin with the fact that virtually every substantive emperor of the southern dynasties took the throne through a violent coup, and each emperor's eventual demise was promptly followed by a civil war. In order to win the civil war, each would-be successor had to have developed a personal network of battle-worthy clients, usually provincial *hanmen*, that were loyal to their individual patron. The clientelage network built up prior to and during the civil war was then swept into power when its central patron assumed the throne; its members survived and prospered, however, only so long as their patron/emperor did, unless they were able to develop personal ties to a new patron who could emerge victorious from the *next* civil war. In other words, each "emperor" essentially ruled a military dictatorship whose members lacked a stable means to perpetuate themselves in power into the next generation.

Chinese historical convention emphasizes the continuity of "dynastic" bloodline; thus, the period from 420 to 589 is identified with the four "dynasties" of Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen 宋齊梁陳. In practice, however, the inheritance of the throne was only marginally through bloodline, and rarely through a formal, designated inheritance procedure. The fact that only one designated heir, Xiao Daocheng's son Xiao Ze 蕭賾 (Qi Emperor Wu 齊武帝), actually survived to establish a stable regime in the years stretching from 420 to 550 (after which Xiangyang was no longer a part of this system) shows that, far from a guarantee of succession, designation as the imperial heir was virtually a guarantee of execution. Conceiving of this system as "dynastic" merely reiterates the fiction perpetuated by imperial history offices, obscuring more than it reveals. Rather than a "dynasty," these ad hoc assemblages of personal military clients would be better described as "regimes," a term that emphasizes the personal and shifting nature of imperial rule during this period.

The personal nature of these patronage networks also demands a more consistent terminology for referring to individuals. In classical texts, and in most modern history, men who took the imperial throne are referred to by their dynastic names; thus, Xiao Yan is much more widely known as Liang Emperor Wu, even though for the first thirty-seven years of his life he had no such title, nor was he expected to. It makes no sense to refer to Xiao Yan as "Liang Emperor Wu" at any point prior to his ascent to the throne; yet it also does not work well to suddenly start calling him by a different name once he became emperor, for it creates a disjunction in our perception of the individual and his clique, when in practice Xiao Yan retained a similar network of personal associates even after he attained the throne (as evidence of his Xiangyang clients demonstrates). The same problem of shifting nomenclature exists for

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imperial princes, who are commonly referred to by their oft-changing fief names (i.e., Xiao Yi 蕭繹 is known as the Prince of Xiangdong 湘東王, as well as Liang Emperor Yuan 梁元帝); for other high officials, who are often referred to by their family name and the title of their highest office (often a posthumous one that they never held while alive); and for the common use of style names, ordinarily adopted at maturity. I have tried to eliminate this multiplicity of nomenclature by using a man's family and given name throughout, regardless of what offices and titles he attained, up to and including the imperial throne; thus, I call Xiao Yan by that name throughout his career, even while he is emperor. The only partial exception to this is my use of the title "Prince" instead of the surname when referring to members of the imperial lineage, so as to signal their familial relationship to the emperor; thus, I refer to the aforementioned Xiao Yi as "Prince Yi."

Most of my other choices of nomenclature are conventional. I use pinyin transliteration throughout (and modify quoted materials accordingly) and translate Chinese official titles following Hucker's *Dictionary* unless otherwise noted. My one other unconventional usage is for dates. Chinese texts demarcate the years by the name of a dynasty and a reign title, followed by the lunar month and sometimes the day, which is indicated by a sexagenary cycle of specialized terms. In most cases I omit the specific day, and I translate the year into the Gregorian calendar year. The Chinese year has twelve or thirteen lunar months (an extracalary month is added occasionally to keep the system aligned with the solar cycle), but they do not correspond to modern months: the first lunar month, for example, may begin anywhere from late January to late February. I find translating this as "Month One" or "first lunar month" to be both cumbersome and unilluminating. Instead, I follow a common Chinese conception of the system by taking the lunar months as a reference to the seasons: the first three months correspond roughly to spring, the next three months to summer, and so forth. Thus, I translate the first three lunar months as "early spring," "mid-spring," and "late spring." This system offers better narrative flow and effectively communicates the time of the year, without sacrificing precision from the original Chinese.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE XIANGYANG REGION

The Xiangyang region was chosen as a case study for several complementary reasons. First, its situation on the frontier with northern regimes meant that it was perennially under military threat, and also inhabited by a large number of immigrants; as a result, issues of identity and loyalty are especially significant. Second, Xiangyang as a region played kingmaker several times during the southern dynasties, most importantly in the coup that put Xiao

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Yan on the throne as Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty. Since Xiao Yan was the longest-reigning, and in many ways the archetypal, southern monarch, understanding his relationship with this provincial area is a critical issue. Third, Xiangyang was pivotal in the eventual collapse of the Jiankang regime, since its surrender to the Chang'an regime in 550 set off the chain of events that caused the loss of the entire central and upper Yangzi region from Jiankang's control. Fourth, there are limited but valuable resources on Xiangyang local culture, including evidence from the "western lyric" tradition (*xi qu* 西曲), anecdotes preserved in local histories and festival calendars, a variety of Buddhist tales, and a few archaeological sites, that can help to flesh out the political history. In order to round out this introduction, therefore, I offer an introduction to the Xiangyang region's geography and history down to the end of the fourth century CE.

The Xiangyang region might be called one the East Asian mainland's "internal frontiers." It is situated on the climatological divide between the wheat and millet-growing north and the rice-growing south, which runs east from the Qinling range through the northern edges of the region and on into the valley of the Huai River. The region is a fairly distinctly demarcated alluvial plain hemmed in on all sides by hills and mountains (see Map 1). Its chief feature is the route of the Han 漢 River (which in this region is also called the Mian 沔), which flows out of the long narrow Hanzhong valley (in the southern part of modern-day Shaanxi). The river skirts the plain on its southwest side, then runs due south, making as if to join immediately with the Yangzi near Jiangling, but instead veering east and wandering through several hundred miles of swampland to join the Yangzi at what is now Wuhan, the modern capital of Hubei province.

The high peaks of the Wudang 武當 and Jing 荊 mountains lie immediately to the south and west of the river's course through this central section, and are drained by several fairly short alpine streams. The majority of the region is north of the river, drained primarily by the Tang-Bai 唐白 system, one of the Han's major tributaries.[32] These rivers in turn have their origins almost two hundred kilometers to the north, in the eastern reaches of the Funiu mountains 伏牛山. This low-lying yet pivotal watershed divides off the region from the upper reaches of both the Ying 穎 River, which flows east into the Huai, and the Yi 伊 and Luo 洛 rivers, which flow north to join the Yellow River just past Luoyang. The hills permit easy passage between all three drainage basins, confusing some early geographers as to which rivers ran in which direction.[33] Where the Tang-Bai system joins with the Han River there are several outcroppings of low foothills that force the Han to execute an elongated bend that swoops first to the northeast, then loops back to the southwest before turning southeast again. This bend is wide and shallow,

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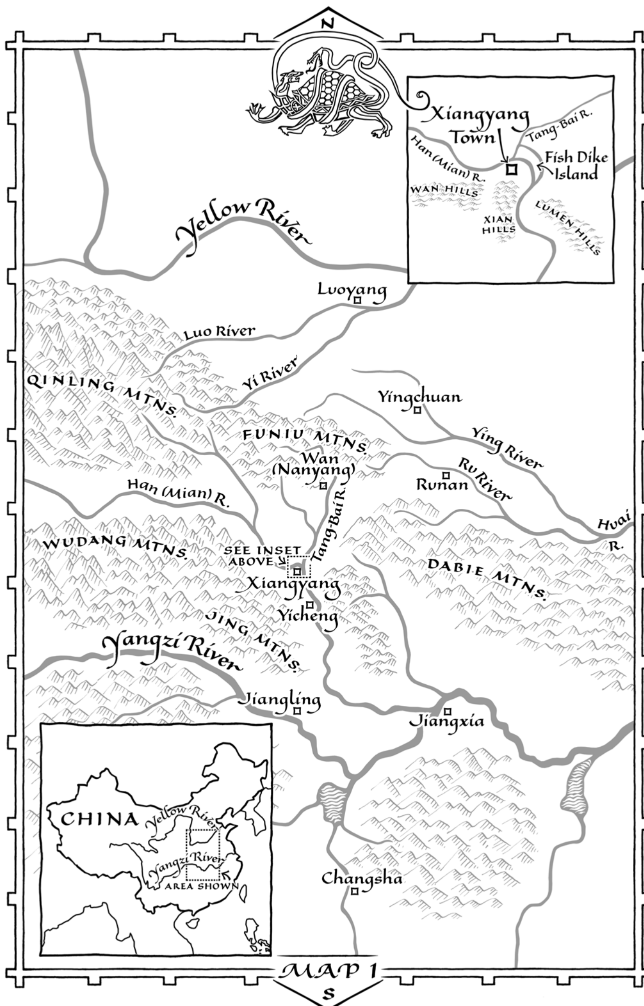
dominated by a flat sandy island called Fish Dike Island (*yuliang zhou* 魚梁洲), and offers excellent places for fording the river. This critical juncture point came to be the location of the town of Xiangyang (see inset, Map 1).

In the early Spring and Autumn period (722–481 BCE) the region was dominated by the state of Chu 楚, whose ancient capital Ying 郢, also known as Yan 鄢, was most likely located near Yicheng 宜城, about forty miles south of the Tang-Bai junction.[34] The region's excellent strategic position as a gateway



Map 1. The central Yangzi area (inset: the Xiangyang region)

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to the Yellow and Huai river valleys made it a desirable route of expansion, and it was fully integrated into the Chu administrative system for more than four hundred years until the campaigns by the northwestern state of Qin 秦 in the late Warring States period (403–221 BCE) led to Chu's collapse.[35] Because of this early history, the geographical divide also gained political, cultural, and linguistic significance, and the entire region has traditionally been identified as part of the south.[36]

With the Qin conquest, the region north of the Han River was organized as Nanyang commandery 南陽郡. Its seat, Wan 宛, about seventy miles up the Bai River from its juncture with the Han, was the commercial hub of the northern part of the plain, and in the Western Han period (202 BCE–9 CE) developed strong links to the prosperous nearby commanderies of Runan 汝南 and Yingchuan 穎川, in the upper Huai valley, and Henan 河南, on the Yellow River. South of the Han River stretched the huge commandery called Nanjun 南郡, or "southern commandery," which included all of the Jiang-Han plain down to the Yangzi river and beyond, and had its seat at Jiangling, on the Yangzi. By the end of the Western Han, Nanyang had become one of the most populous commanderies in the empire, controlling thirty-six counties with almost two million inhabitants; the town of Wan itself probably boasted a population of well over a hundred thousand, and had become a major commercial and political center.[37]

In the rebellions to overthrow the rule of Wang Mang in 23–25 CE, leadership in the Nanyang area came from a branch of the Han imperial house based in the southeastern part of the commandery. A member of this branch, Liu Xiu 劉秀, ultimately established himself as Han Emperor Guangwu (漢光武帝, r. 25–57 CE), thereby restoring the Han imperial house. Many of his closest advisors and supporters hailed from the Nanyang area, and the town of Wan came to be regarded as the "southern capital." With the primary capital relocated from Chang'an to Luoyang, an easy 120 miles north of Wan, the entire region was much closer and better connected to the center of imperial power than ever before.[38]

Up until this time, the town of Xiangyang itself had been of little account, the northernmost county seat in the sprawling, rather uncivilized "southern commandery." Over the course of the next two hundred years, however, the population of this southern realm grew sharply, and the wealth and patronage that flowed into the Nanyang area seeped across the border to benefit the local elites of Xiangyang, Yicheng, and other towns south of the river. Their assimiliation into the Han imperial system made even faster gains with the decline of the Han imperial court at the end of the second century. A distant member of the imperial clan, Liu Biao 劉表, set up an independent regime based at Xiangyang which claimed authority over all of the central Yangzi area (Jing province 荊州, roughly equal to modern Hubei and Hunan). He

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patronized hundreds of wealthy and well-educated émigrés from the capital elite to engage in scholarly work and support his bid to once again "re-found" the Liu clan's fortunes. Though this campaign ultimately failed, local men gained contacts with educated and powerful men from all over the empire, and many of them wound up in service to one of the three rival imperial courts that struggled with one another through the subsequent Three Kingdoms period (220–280 CE).[39]

The rise to importance of the vast Yangzi watershed, and the heightened emphasis on military activity, brought Xiangyang to center stage in this period, for it was a pivotal transition point for the movement of men and goods between north and south. Material shipped by waterway from the south came up the Yangzi and Han rivers and then had to be offloaded at Xiangyang for the overland trek to Luoyang or other points on the Yellow River watershed. Goods moving wholly by land also had to cross the Han River at the fords at Xiangyang. As a result, military forces from the south needed to protect the region in order to have a place to offload men and material and prepare for overland campaigns to the north, or defend against them. Northern regimes needed to control the region to prevent this eventuality, and to have a place to prepare naval expeditions against any southern regime. The Cao 曹 regime (under Cao Cao, 155–220, and his successors, who ruled the Wei 魏 kingdom, 220–265) developed Xiangyang and the Fan fortress 樊城, just across the river on the north side, as their key defensive position in northern Jing province. They fought many battles in the area, first with the fledgling regime of Liu Bei 劉備 (161–223), then with the regime of Sun Quan 孫權 (182–252) and his successors in the Wu 吳 kingdom (229–280) based at Jiankang (then called Jianye 建業). The Sima 司馬 regime (eventual founders of the western Jin 晉 dynasty, 265–316), which succeeded the Cao regime in the north, followed this pattern, using Xiangyang as a primary staging area for their successful conquest of the south in 280 CE.[40]

The literate elite at Xiangyang enjoyed the patronage and protection afforded by this imperial attention throughout the third century, even as the private military forces they depended on became increasingly prominent, especially in surrounding hinterland areas. The civil wars and general chaos and collapse of the Jin court in the early fourth century led to a swift collapse of the arrangement, however. In the years 310–311, as the Jin capital at Luoyang was being sacked, Xiangyang town itself experienced a violent rebellion of immigrant armed groups, followed by an invasion by the rapacious armies of Shi Le 石勒, a plague epidemic, and a sweeping fire that killed thousands and put an end to several of Xiangyang's most eminent family lines.[41]

Over the next several decades, virtually all of the educated elite in the Xiangyang region either died, fell into obscurity, or moved away to more promising locales. The new "eastern" Jin capital, at Jiankang on the Yangzi

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delta, was far away, and Xiangyang came to be regarded as a semi-barbarian frontier outpost. A few fortunate local men managed to work their way into the lower rungs of the Jiankang elite; many more, especially from the once-eminent Nanyang region north of the river, resettled in Jiangling and aided in the slow rebuilding of a Jing provincial administration. Meanwhile, the Xiangyang region itself experienced waves of immigrants fleeing the chaotic conditions in the north. By the end of the fourth century, the makeup of Xiangyang's population was almost totally transformed.[42]

Despite these tremendous changes, the Xiangyang region retained its geo-strategic significance as a pivotal transfer point on the frontier between north and south, as well as a fertile and potentially populous region. Regardless of the makeup of that population, it was an area that, from a military standpoint, no regime could long afford to ignore. The story this work seeks to tell is how the southern court at Jiankang dealt with the area, and, more importantly, who the men in the area were, and how they dealt with the southern court.

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