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## Cultural Interactions and Competitions: The Case of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) and the Southern Tang (937–965)\*

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This article aims to elaborate on an overarching sense of competition in the area of cultural achievement (*wenhua jiaoliang*) that existed between the Song and the Southern Tang. By adopting a conceptual framework characterized by regional significance and dynamic interactions in interpreting historical events and issues, the article intends to emphasize that cultural achievement in Song China did not emerge overnight; instead it involved a long process of assimilation and accommodation that led to the new alignment. In this sense, the various expressions of contempt, rejection, and even confrontation that took place during Song Taizu's reign seemed an inevitable stage that would lead to adaptation and finally, assimilation. Ultimately, all cultural interactions and competitions with the Southern Tang were undertaken by the Song literati for the purpose of establishing dynastic-political legitimacy and strengthening cultural identity. This article also discusses the use of anecdotal information (*biji*) in historical studies. Historians have long disregarded anecdotal information: it amounted to nothing more than hearsay in its ability to provide meaningful information while the standard histories are perceived to unveil actual historical events. However, exploration of both categories can uncover contradictions, necessitating explanation about the circumstances under which such hearsay can be useful. The author emphasizes that despite their structural defects, anecdotes being recorded in the *biji* are of particular significance to social and cultural studies. As such, the functions of anecdotal information should not be totally neglected.

**Keywords:** Competition in the cultural domain (*wenhua jiaoliang*), legitimate dynastic succession (*zhengtong*), reinstated officials from the defeated Nan Tang (*Nan Tang peichen*), literary sketches (*biji*), the Southern Tang

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## I. Introduction

This article, by making use of standard histories, miscellaneous histories, collected works, and literary sketches (*biji* 筆記), aims to elaborate on cultural interactions and competitions between the Song Dynasty 宋朝 (960–1279: Northern Song 北宋, 960–1127; Southern Song 南宋, 1127–1279) and the Southern Tang 南唐 (937–975).<sup>1</sup> When the Song launched its military campaign to achieve national unification, the Southern Tang was not strong enough to compete, thus leading to the regime's collapse. But to Song literati, with their strong sense of cultural pride, the victory was neither complete nor thorough.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that Southern Tang territories were entirely overtaken by the Song, the defeat of the Southern Tang was solely confined to political and military aspects, while its cultural edge remained intact. Contrary to the cultural splendor that scholars tend to portray, the Northern Song, immediately following its founding, still clung culturally to traditions characterized by simple, unadorned, militant, and unrestrained styles that originated in the late Tang and the Five Dynasties 五代 (907–960);<sup>3</sup> these

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- 1 On details of primary sources for the study of the Song and the Southern Tang, see Chen Gaohua 陳高華 and Chen Zhichao 陳智超, *Zhongguo gudai shi shiliao xue* 中國古代史史料學 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1983). Among western scholars, Johannes L. Kurz has been known for his painstaking efforts dedicated to this regard, and his contributions are well reflected in the following articles: Kurz, "Sources for the History of the Southern Tang (937–975)," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 24 (1994): 217–35; idem, "The Invention of a 'Faction' in Song Historical Writings on the Southern Tang," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 28 (1998): 1–35; idem, "A Survey of the Historical Sources for the Five Dynasties and Ten States in Song Times," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 33 (2003): 187–224.
  - 2 This article at times uses the term "literati" instead of "scholar-officials" on the grounds that the latter commonly refers to civil servants recruited by the civil service examinations while the former is always vaguely defined as an educated class or individuals interested in literature or the arts. The definition of literati in some cases fits the article better, as some involved in descriptions were intellectuals but not necessarily bureaucrats; regardless, most of those in question held both identities.
  - 3 For descriptions of the cultural splendor in Song China, consult Liu Pei-chi 劉伯驥, *Songdai zhengjiao shi* 宋代政教史 (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1971), 2 vols.; Yao Yingtin 姚瀛艇 [et al.], ed[s.], *Songdai wenhua shi* 宋代文化史 (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 1992); Yang Weisheng 楊渭生, *Songdai wenhua xin guan cha* 宋代文化新觀察 (Baoding: Hebei daxue chubanshe, 2008). Since 1993, major academic institutions affiliated with Sichuan University, namely Sichuan daxue guji zhengli yanjiu suo 四川大學古籍整理研究所 and Sichuan daxue Songdai wenhua yanjiu ziliao zhongxin 四川大學宋代文化研究資料中心, have collaborated to edit a series of publications titled *Songdai wenhua yanjiu* 宋代文化研