



Political Role Played by Yanzhis in the Xiongnu Empire *Hun İmparatorluğu'nda Yanzhıların Oynadığı Politik Rol*

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Abstract

Yanzhi title associated with the title huanghou (empress) in Chinese sources, was often used to include concubines of the chanyu. Women who were called yanzhi were generally recorded for their political activities during the decline of the Xiongnu Empire and the weakening of the chanyu's authority. In spite of that, yanzhis were functional as part of a permanent system. The empire was ruled by the Luandi/Xulianti dynasty. The dynasty established marriage ties only with certain noble families. These families were the ruling partners of the dynasty and their marriage ties represented the political cooperation between them and the dynasty. Chanyus probably had a concubine from each noble family, and the woman who was the most powerful and important family's member rose as yanzhi. Yanzhi not only represented the strength of the bond between her family and chanyu, but also worked as an intermediary to strengthen the bond. Typical in steppe societies, the custom of marrying stepmother when the father died, or sister in law when the brother died, helped the yanzhi to maintain her position and the power of her family. However, the new chanyu inherited all concubines and could claim any of them as yanzhi. In this case, the balance of power was changing. In order to both maintain their position and influence, these yanzhis were making efforts to be accepted as yanzhi by the newly erected chanyu or to put their own son on the throne. In times when the central authority of the empire weakened, these efforts could cause great turmoil.

Keywords: Xiongnu; Yanzhi; Succession; Struggle for the Throne; Heqin

Özet

Çin kaynaklarında huanghou (imparatoriçe) unvanıyla eşleştirilen yanzhi unvanı, çoğunlukla chanyulerin cariyelerini de kapsayacak şekilde kullanılmıştır. Yanzhi unvanıyla anılan kadınlar genelde Hun İmparatorluğu'nun güçten düştüğü ve chanyu otoritesinin zayıfladığı dönemlerdeki siyasal etkinlikleriyle kaydedilmişlerdir. Yanzhıların siyasal etkinlikleri kriz dönemleri dışında neredeyse hiç anılmıyorsa da daimi bir sistemin parçası olarak işlevseldi. İmparatorluğu Luanti/Xuliandi hanedanı yönetiyordu. Hanedan yalnızca belirli soylu ailelerle karşılıklı kız alıp veriyordu. Bu aileler hanedanın iktidar ortağı olup evlilik bağları hanedanla aralarındaki siyasî iş birliğini temsil ediyordu. Chanyulerin muhtemelen her soylu aileden bir cariyesi bulunuyor, en güçlü ve önemli ailenin ferdi olan kadın da yanzhi makamına yükseliyordu. Yanzhi, ailesiyle chanyu arasındaki bağı güçlülüğünü temsil etmekle kalmayıp bağı güçlendiren bir aracı gibi de çalışıyordu. Bozkır toplumlarında tipik olan baba ölünce üvey anneyle veya abi ölünce yengeyle evlenme âdeti yanzhi'nin pozisyonunu ve ailesinin gücünü korumasına yardımcı oluyordu. Ancak yeni chanyu bütün cariyeleri tevarüs ediyordu ve içlerinden herhangi birini yanzhi yapabiliirdi. Bu durumda güç dengeleri değişiyordu. Bu bakımdan yanzhiler hem pozisyonunu korumak hem de etkinliğini sürdürebilmek için yeni chanyu tarafından yanzhi ilan edilmek yahut

kendi oğlunu tahta geçirmek için çaba sarf ediyordu. İmparatorluğun merkezi otoritesinin zayıfladığı dönemlerde bu çabalar büyük çalkantılara yol açabiliyordu.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Kutadgu Bilig, Yusuf Khass Hajib, religion and state, Kün-Togdi, Odgurmış*

Sima Qian (司馬遷), author of the *Shi Ji* (史記), wrote that in Modu Chanyu's¹ reign the Xiongnu (匈奴) became a powerful threat to China. Because of this reason the Chinese began to inscribe their history. Modu himself is known to history for his legendary story. His father Touman² also had a yanzhi (闕氏). Yanzhi wanted her son to be the heir. She convinced Touman to send Modu to Yuezhi (月氏) as hostage and then let Touman attacked them. Thus, Yuezhi was going to kill Modu and her son was going to be the heir. When they came to kill him, Modu escaped miraculously. Touman rewarded him for his courage by appointing him as the commander of ten thousand horsemen. Modu raised his army with iron discipline. Killed his father, mother in law and her son and claimed the throne. (SJ: 110: 2888; HS: 94A: 3749). Although what she did seem to be related to her personal greediness, from the later history of the Xiongnu, we know that these kind of conspiracies are mostly about power struggles among the noble families or within the imperial family. By addressing this narrative, I aim to examine yanzhi role regarding power relations in the Xiongnu Empire.

Yanzhi as a Title

Sources provides a little about marriage customs of the Xiongnu. According to *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu*, the Xiongnu married their mother in law after their father died and when their elder brothers died, they married their sister in law (SJ: 110: 2879; HS: 94A: 3743). According to Lin Gan who thought at the beginning of the 3th century B.C. the Xiongnu society developed to a slave society which newly developed private property, in the Xiongnu era marriage bonded not two individuals but two clans. A clan's need to cooperate with other clans due to security and economy matters, gave way to exogamous marriage ties (Lin, 2007, p. 161-164). Shu Shunlin agrees with him (Shu, 1995, p. 66).

After marrying with a man from other clan, woman becomes a member of her husband's clan, but when her husband dies she is no more member of his clan. Probability of her collecting her husband's heritage and leaving considered a risk for her husband's clan. To prevent her from leaving, marrying her to another clan member (in most cases her brother in law, and sometimes her son in law) became

¹冒頓單于. Reigned 209-174 B.C.

²頭曼. Reigned ?- 209 B.C.

custom for Inner Asian societies. By doing so, they secure passed away husband's property, widow's work force³ and ties with her clan.

Shi Gu's (師古) annotation in to *Hanshu* claims that yanzhi is the Xiongnu empress' title (HS: 94A: 3749). However modern Chinese scholars have doubt about it. After examining sources Wang Weidi concludes yanzhi was not empress title. Yanzhis were simply chanyu's consorts (Wang, 1984, p. 172). Hei Longjiang and Lang Dianjun suggested yanzhi was not only chanyu's wife's title but also Xiongnu begs' wives (Hei & Lan, 1989, p. 36). Sources such as Shi Ji and Han Shu includes clear state that yazhi was Xiongnu empress title. However in some cases the same sources "informs" us about more than one yanzhi. So the main question here is if a chanyu had more than one wife or not. If chanyus had only one wife with the title of yanzhi, then other yanzhis mentioned in sources were only consorts who were represented as yanzhis by mistake.

In 36 B.C. when Han generals suprisingly attacked Zhizhi Chanyu, the chanyu ordered every yanzhi and adult men to gather arms and shoot the enemy. After Han army gained victory, they took 1518 people including yanzhis and princes (HS: 70: 3014). In 49 A.D. Southern Xiongnu chanyu sent his son as prisoner. Being flattered, Han ruler bestowed gifts to him. In the same year emperor sent ten thousand pieces of silk for chanyu's mother, all yanzhis, sons who were left and right sage begs, left and right luli begs and guduhaus (HHS: 89: 2944).

There are two title groups related to yanzhi in sources: great yanzhi and zhuanqu yanzhi. In some cases great yanzhi was chanyu's mother and former chanyu's widow (HS: 54: 2457). But there are other records including both great and zhuanqu yanzhis. After his enthronement, Xulüquanqu Chanyu appointed right great general's daughter as great yanzhi and downgraded former yanzhi's favorite zhuanqu yanzhi (HS: 94A: 3787; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 48). After his death, zhuanqu yanzhi managed to enhtrone Woyanqudi. In return, she became the only yanzhi (HS: 94A: 3789; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 50). While Huhanye Chanyu was in his deathbed; two sisters, zhuanqu yanzhi and great yanzhi was on his side. Accoring to Han Shu, zhuanqu yanzhi's position was higher. On the other hand, there were Wang Zhaojun who were "Ninghu Yanzhi" (HS: 94B: 3807; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 66-67). In this case, Huhanye Chanyu had three yanzhis i.e. three empresses. Considering their powerful lineages, it would be understandable each one of them to be bestowed yanzhi title. Bu other cases, a chanyu's having more than one yanzhi/empress seems to be unusual. Since

³ Most Inner Asian societies' customs require husband to pay bride wealth to bride's family. Since in Inner Asian societies every individual participates work force taking a bride means her family to lose work force. Groom has to compensate this lose. Turkish word "gelin" means "bride" and related to "to come". Another Turkish word "kalın" means "bride wealth" and related to "to stay". If a man takes a bride (work force) away from her family, he has to pay bride wealth "to stay". DLT: 393.

Huhanye's political situation was on a knife-edge; he may needed to give yanzhi title to three women to gain their families support.

According to records mentioned above, I suggest yanzhi was empress title of the Xiongnu. But Chinese sources applied this title even to consorts like in the case of Zhizhi Chanyu. Because I do not think Xiongnu chanyus had more than one empress except Huhanye.

Power Struggles Among Dynasty Members

The Xiongnu Imperial Family was Luandi (攏鞮) or according to the *Hou Han Shu* it was Xuliandi (虛連題). From Touman to Junchen⁴, the throne succeeded from father to son (Chen, 2007, p. 231). We don't know what was the former chanyus' titles before they succeeded the throne but most likely all of them were left sage beg (Ercilasun, 2019, p. 210). That was a fair and useful system. Since the tradition permitted only sons to succeed, succession allowed only a certain branch of the dynasty, so that the potential succession crises wouldn't occur among distant family members. Chanyu's appointment of his heir as left sage beg was another measure (SJ: 110: 2890; HS:94A: 3751; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 8). Although the heir was appointed by chanyu by his will, the heir needed be approved by delegates at the kurultai as well (Ercilasun, 2019, p. 221). Gathering the kurultai was a serious and essential business in the steppe tradition. Generally the kurultai gathered 3 times per year (SJ: 110: 2892; HS: 94A: 3752; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 8). For succession voting was realized by kurultai. Thus, the new chanyu started a good relation with his vassals or it was hoped so.

When Junchen died in 126 B.C. his brother Left Luli Beg Yizhixie⁵ seized the throne by attacking Junchen's son, Yüdan (SJ: 110: 2907; HS: 94A: 3767; ZZTC: 18: 609; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 25; Lin, 1984, p. 22). Yizhixie broke both rules of the tradition: the kurultai's consent and the left sage beg's being the heir himself (Ercilasun, 2019, p. 73). This was a turning point. Thereafter, the tradition became fragile. It became possible for brother to succeed his brother, disregarding the kurultai or even to seize the throne by force. Succession from brother to brother allowed cousins to claim the throne as all of them were sons of a chanyu. This problem led destabilization since some princes plotted or opened war against each other. If new chanyu came from a branch of the dynasty that was far from power for a couple of generations, it would cause a great chaos.

Woyanqudi Chanyu⁶ was Wuwei Chanyu's⁷ grandson (HS: 94A: 3789; Onat, et al. 2004, p. 50; ZZTC: 26: 858). This branch of the dynasty was absent from power for more than 30 years. Since the ministers came from certain noble

⁴軍臣單于. Reigned 161-126 B.C.

⁵伊稚斜單于. Reigned 126-114 B.C.

⁶握衍胸鞮單于. Reigned 60-58 B.C.

⁷烏維單于. Reigned 114-105 B.C.

families and had marital ties with the chanyus, Woyanqudi's ties with government was weak. He had to reestablish the government to strengthen his own position. He started by executing nobles like Xingweiyang⁸. He deposed former chanyu's brothers, sons and close relatives and then appointed his own sons and brothers (HS: 94A: 3789-3790; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 50-51; ZZTC: 26: 858-859). One of deposed sons of former chanyu was Jihoushan (稽侯獬), the future Huhanye Chanyu⁹. His father in law Wuchanmu (烏禪幕) was the king of a vassal state between Wusun and Kangju. He was married with Rizhu Beg Xianxianchan's¹⁰ sister. There was hostility between Woyanqudi and Xianxianchan. Xianxianchan took refuge in China. Despite Wuchanmu's objection, chanyu executed Xianxianchan's two brothers. Wuhuan invaded Xiongnu border in 58 B.C. (Lin, 1984, p. 50). Chanyu blamed guxi beg (姑夕王). Guxi beg and Wuchanmu declared Jihoushan as Huhanye Chanyu. Huhanye's army defeated Woyanqudi and forced him to commit suicide (HS: 94A: 3790-3791; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 51-52; ZZTC: 27: 867; TD: 195: 5333).

Woyanqudi broke every rule. His extreme and ruthless decisions drove the empire into dissolution. Huhanye's being declared chanyu by his fellowmen has shown the fact that every member of the dynasty can claim the throne. A year later, there were 4 more chanyus (HS: 94B: 3795-3796; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 53-54; ZZTC: 27: 868; Chen, 2007, p. 295-296). There was even Li Ling's son who was not descended from the dynasty among the ones who claimed themselves as chanyus¹¹. This civil war gave way to split the empire to two halves and Huhanye's submission to Han.

Brother succession did not always cause turmoil in short term. The only outcome of Yizhixie's taking the throne by force was the result of his nephew to take refuge in China. Although succession system has become more complicated, Xulihu Chanyu's¹² election by the kurultai after his nephew Wushilu Chanyu's¹³ death seemed the best choice as his nephew's son was a little child (SJ: 110: 2916; HS: 94A: 3775; ZZTC: 21: 703). One year later, when Xulihu Chanyu died, also

⁸ 刑未央. His title was haosu beg (郝宿王). He was the one who invited delegates to the kurultai when Xuliquanqu Chanyu died.

⁹ 呼韓邪單于. Reigned 58-31 B.C.

¹⁰ 日逐王先賢揮. His father was one of two sons of Qiedihou Chanyu with the title as left grand commander. When Qiedihou died the kurultai elected him. But he left the throne for his elder brother Hulugu Chanyu. Hulugu appointed him as left sage beg (the heir). But soon after he died. Hulugu did not appoint Xianxianchan as left sage beg but rizhu beg (HS: 94A: 3778 and 3790; ZZTC: 22: 721-722).

¹¹ Li Ling (李陵) was married with Qiedihou Chanyu's daughter. His son was Wuji Commander (烏藉都尉).

¹² 响犁湖單于 or according to Hanshu Julihu Chanyu 句黎湖單于. Reigned 102-101 B.C.

¹³ 烏師廬單于 or according to Hanshu Zhanshilu Chanyu 詹師廬單于. Also known as The Child Chanyu (兒單于) because he was a child when he ascended the throne. Reigned 105-102 B.C.

the best choice was to elect Xulihu's other brother¹⁴ (SJ: 110: 2917; HS: 94A: 3776; ZZTC: 21: 708). For 77 years following Huhanye's death in 31 BCE (Lin, 1984, p. 59), reigned all 6 chanyus were Huhanye's sons (Ercilasun, 2019, p. 211). None of these caused problems in short term. On the other hand, each and every one of them had catastrophic consequences in long term. Long lasted series of brother succession came to an end with Huduershidaogao Ruodi Chanyu¹⁵ in 18 CE (Lin, 1984, p. 68). He was Huhanye's latest son who ascended the throne among his other sons. Left sage beg was chanyu's brother. Chanyu got rid of him and his son having them assassinated, appointed his own son as the left sage beg (HHS: 89: 2941). That would've been a good move to stabilize the empire. However soon after his nephew Right Yujian Rizhu Beg Bi (右奠韃日逐王比) protested against chanyu by claiming that he was the rightful heir as he was Wuzhuliu Ruodi Chanyu's¹⁶ elder son (HHS: 89: 2942). When chanyu died at 46 A.D. (Lin, 1984, p. 78), his son ascended to the throne, but he also died at that summer. This time Punu¹⁷, the youngest son of Huhanye, was elected (HHS: 89: 2942; ZZTC: 43: 1402). Bi was determined to claim the throne but he didn't have enough power to seize. He secretly moved in China and declared himself Huhanye the Second (HHS: 89: 2942; ZZTC: 43: 1402). By doing so, he gave his loyalty to The Han Emperor. Thus, the Xiongnu Empire was divided once more due to the succession problems.

Beginning with Touman, the dynasty grew crowded generation by generation. Conflicts within the dynasty increased as the new titles were needed for princes and the number of shareholders grew. The slightest of these problems was that the princes did not attend the kurultai if they were not satisfied with their titles. By refusing to attend the kurultai, princes showed their dissatisfaction in a modest way (Chen, 2007, p. 280). Princes with greater dissatisfaction defected to China along with their people. Most of these people were the princes whose ascendancy to the throne was denied. When Huyandi¹⁸ enthroned in a questionable way, left sage beg and right luli beg planned to submit to Han, but they didn't dare to do this alone. Therefore, they forced lutu beg to join them. Lutu beg denounced them to chanyu. They denied the accusations and decided not to attend to kurultai at Longcheng (HS: 94A: 3782; ZZTC: 23: 753). After the fraudulent enthronement of Woyanqudi, Jihoushan united with his father in law. Left rizhu beg took refuge in China (HS: 94A: 3790; ZZTC: 26: 859). First Southern Xiongnu chanyu Bi also submitted to Han because he could not ascend the throne (HHS: 89: 2942; TD: 195: 5347).

¹⁴ 且鞮侯單于 Qiedihou Chanyu. Reigned 101-96 B.C.

¹⁵ 呼都而屍道臯若鞮單于. Personal name Yu (輿). Reigned 18-46A.D..

¹⁶ 烏珠留若鞮單于. Reigned 8 B.C.-13A.D..

¹⁷ 蒲奴單于. Founder of the Northern Xiongnu Empire. Reigned 48-?A.D..

¹⁸ 壺衍鞮單于. Reigned 85-68 B.C.

In some of these events that drove the empire to destabilization, yanzhis played a role, directly or indirectly, through their relationships with princes or noble families.

Positions of the Noble Families

According to *Shi Ji* and *Han Shu*, Xiongnu had three noble families: Huyan (呼衍), Xubu (須卜) and Lan (蘭)¹⁹. Hou Han Shu adds Qiulin (丘林) Family. These families had marriage ties with the royal family (SJ: 110: 2890-2891; HS: 94A: 3751; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 8). There were more noble families. Fuzhulei Ruodi Chanyu's²⁰ two daughters were married to the members of Xubu and Dangyu (當于) families (HS: 94B: 3808; ZZTC: 30: 960). Since Huyan Family was at the left, Xubu and Lan families were at the right side, the most noble family was Huyan (HHS: 89: 2945). Members of these families occupied certain positions and those were "hereditary positions" (Miller, 2014, p. 6). Family leaders were judges (HHS: 89: 2945). They also served chanyu as guduhou (骨都侯)²¹. After the empire divided into northern and southern parts, members of new families became guduhou as well: Han guduhou (韓氏骨都侯) at Beidi (北地), Dangyu guduhou (當于骨都侯) at Wuyuan (五原), Huyan guduhou (呼衍骨都侯) at Yunzhong (雲中), Lang guduhou (郎氏骨都侯) at Dingxiang (定襄), Liji guduhou (栗籍骨都侯) at Daijun (代郡) (HHS: 89: 2945). Leader of Huyan Family was Huyan beg (呼衍王). His territory extended from Tanrı Mountains (天山) to Qilian Mountains (祁連山)²². Huyan beg became more important for Northern Xiongnu after the empire's second division (McGovern, 1939, p. 260).

It was possible for them to affect chanyu's decisions or even to decide who will be the next chanyu via marriages between his close relatives like his daughters or sisters. Right guduhou Xubu Dang (須卜當) was married to Fuzhulei Ruodi Chanyu's daughter Princess Yimo (伊墨居次)²³. Dang and Yimo dominated both domestic and foreign policies. After Wuzhuliu Chanyu's death, they enthroned Xian²⁴ who was in good relationship with Yimo (HS: 94B: 3827; ZZTC: 37: 1200). Yimo suggested chanyu to request heqin. They accepted bribe from envoys to hand over Chinese deserters (HS: 94B: 3828). 3 years later (18

¹⁹ Gumilëv claims that Huyan is Turkish word kuyan means rabbit. Xubu is also Turkish word means country. He considered Lan as Chinese word means orchid (Gumilëv, 2013, p. 91)

²⁰ 復株累若鞮單于. Reigned 30-21 B.C.

²¹ According to Shiji, guduhous were grand ministers from non-dynasty royal families (異姓大臣) (SJ: 110: 2891). There were left and right guduhous to help chanyu to govern (SJ: 110: 2891; HS: 94A: 3751; TD: 194: 5304). Some scholars think "gudu" means "kutlug" and guduhou means "kutlug beg" as "hou" was a Chinese title frequently translated as "marquis". Ercilasun, 2019, p. 216-217; Miller, 2014, p. 7.

²² HHS: 2: 120 note 3. See Onat, et al., 2004, p. 114.

²³ Yimo Juci. Juci means princess. Her personal name was Yun (云). HS: 94B: 3807; ZZTC: 37: 1200.

²⁴ Wulei Ruodi Chanyu (烏累若鞮單于). Personal name Xian (咸). Reigned 13-18A.D..

A.D.) left sage beg Yu (輿) enthroned as Huduershidaogao Chanyu²⁵(HS: 94B: 3829; Lin, 1984, p. 68). He sent Yimo, Dang and Dangyu Princess' son Xidu beg (醯攢王) to Wang Mang²⁶ with presents. These were the last years of Xubu Dang. Wang Mang tried and failed to gather an army to enthrone him as Xubu Shanyu (須卜善于) (HS: 99: 4155-4156). In the meantime Dang died (HS: 94B: 3829; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 91; ZZTC: 38: 1225).

Yanzhis in Politics

There were no position open to women in the Xiongnu Empire. Women had to marry with a man who had important position as they weren't able to access to power directly. It doesn't mean that men didn't want women to be involved in politics. On the contrary, especially noble families seek for a chance to establish marriage ties with powerful men. When they were married with powerful men, women were expected to serve their families' interests. Powerful men -including chanyu- also wanted to marry with noble women to make alliances with their families. Women acted like diplomats among their husbands and families.

Chanyus had many wives with title of yanzhi. Some of them were ordinary women captured in wars. Also, according to Ji Jie's annotation to *Shi Ji*, some and most influential yanzhis were members of the noble families (SJ: 110: 2891). Huhanye Chanyu's favorite yanzhis were Huyan beg's two daughters (HS: 94B: 3806-3807; ZZTC: 30: 959-960). Huyandi Chanyu's zhuanqu yanzhi was left grand qiequ's (左大且渠) daughter. Xulüquanqu Chanyu²⁷ downgraded her position and gave grand yanzhi title to right grand general's (右大將) daughter (HS: 94A: 3787). Lastly, there were Han princesses like Wang Zhaojun²⁸ married to chanyu according to Heqin Treaty.

Each yanzhi had a rank in yanzhi hierarchy. In 13th century Friar William of Rubruck witnessed that Batu's 26 wives placed their residences according to their ranks (Jackson and Morgan, 2010, p. 74)²⁹. The same policy should be effectual for Xiongnu yanzhis. Since left side symbolized east, it was steppe tradition for the nobility to sit on the left side. Therefore, left sage beg (左賢王) was the heir to chanyu. Presumably high-ranking yanzhis always belonged to the left side. The highest yanzhi title was zhuanqu yanzhi (顛渠闕氏). Chanyu's mother was grand yanzhi (大闕氏) (ZZTC: 23: 753) but there were others with grand yanzhi title.

²⁵ 呼都而屍道臯若鞮單于. Reigned 18-46 A.D.

²⁶ 王莽. Usurper of Han throne. Reigned 8-22A.D.. as Xin Emperor.

²⁷ 虛閭權渠單于. Reigned 68-60 B.C.

²⁸ 王昭君. Personal name Wang Qiang(王嬙). When Huhanye Chanyu visited Han court in 33 B.C. Han emperor Yuandi (元帝) ordered her to marry to Huhanye. The Xiongnu gave her the Ninghu Yanzhi title (寧胡闕氏).

²⁹ Although William claims that chief wife's residence was placed at the westernmost end, we know that steppe people believed that the left side (east) was blessed. Chief wives residence should be placed at the easternmost end.

Families of high-ranking yanzhis had more influence on chanyu. By bestowing yanzhi higher rank, chanyu showed her family's importance.

Chanyus and most noblemen had many wives. Wives competed on two issues. First, gaining the trust of their husband with their political advices and the second was giving birth to a son. By doing so, women could leave other wives behind and share their husbands' or sons' power. Modu's stepmother had enough influence on her husband Touman, to persuade him to kill his own son. If the plan was successful, her son would become the heir. She was already sharing her husband's power and would be sharing her son's power in the future. Hulugu Chanyu had a stepbrother who was the left grand central commandant. He was very popular among people. Hulugu's mother worried about chanyu appointing him as his heir, not her son. She assassinated the left grand central commandant. His brother did not attend the kurultai no longer. Hulugu said "my son is very young. He is not able to govern. I prefer my brother, the left luli beg to take the throne" when he fell terribly ill. After chanyu passed, his mother and Wei Lü covered up chanyu's will and enthroned his son left luli beg as Huyandi Chanyu. As it's mentioned before, the left sage beg and the right luli beg rejected to attend the kurultai after their plan to submit to Han was exposed. At that time, Huyandi was young. His mother yanzhi took over control for at least 3 years cooperating with Wei Lü. Her actions caused unrest. People were afraid of being attacked by Han armies. Wei Lü suggested that building a city to stock food in case of being attacked, food would be distributed from that city. Preparations immediately started but in short time they realized that defending a city was very difficult to Xiongnu (HS: 94A: 3782).

Huhanye Chanyu's two favorite yanzhis were left yizhizi's elder brother Huyan beg's daughters. Elder one zhuanqu yanzhi had two sons: Qiemoché (且莫車) and Nangzhiyasi (囊知牙斯). Younger one grand yanzhi had four sons: Diaotaomogao (雕陶莫皋), Qiemixu (且麋胥), Xian (咸) and Le (樂). Other yanzhis had 10 more sons. Before his death, Huhanye decided zhuanqu yanzhi's eldest son Qiemoché to be his heir. Zhuanqu yanzhi opposed this idea saying "Xiongnu people is in chaos for more than ten years. It is like woolly hair. We found peace again thanks to Han support. There isn't much time passed since we found peace. People are afraid of war. Since Qiemoché is still too young, people will not obey him and I am afraid our country will fall in chaos once more. Grand yanzhi and I are a family. We do not distinguish our children. It would be better if Diaotaogao ascend the throne." Grand yanzhi responded saying "Even if Qiemoché is young, he can manage state affairs with statesmen's help. Today if we put aside a noble son and enthrone other son with lesser rank, there will be chaos in the future." Finally Huhanye agreed with zhuanqu yanzhi. He decided Diaotaomogao to be his heir on condition that he will give up the throne to his brother (HS: 94B: 3806-3807; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 66-67).

This event highlights the great importance of the impact of competition among yanzhis on destabilization. Having learned from past succession crises, two yanzhis put stabilization above all. Sister yanzhis' first move to prevent power struggles between their sons was to give consent to each other. I would like to point out that meanwhile all of these are happening, other yanzhis were quiet. Most likely yanzhi sisters neutralized others and shared authority.

The most powerful yanzhis promoted to zhuanqu or grand yanzhi positions. When chanyu died all delegates were invited. Gathering all of them took several months, maybe even a year. During this time, zhuanqu or grand yanzhi were acting as regent for chanyu. By occasion, yanzhis had opportunity to leave out the kurultai or manipulate chanyu's testament to impose their own interests. Yanzhi's close relatives also affected court policy. Left grand qiequ got angry when he heard his daughter yanzhi was degraded by Xulüquanqu Chanyu. In the meeting about heqin policy with Han, he persuaded chanyu not to make peace, instead attack (HS: 94A: 3787-3788). Before Xiongnu army reach the border, three horsemen informed Han authorities. Han army prepared to defend their borders. Emperor sent an army under Grand General Inspector Zhi Zhong (大將軍軍監治眾) and other 4 generals. Dividing into three corps, Han army crossed the border and defeated the Xiongnu. Same year, Xiongnu suffered from famine (HS: 94A: 3788; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 48-49). When chanyu died, yanzhi and her brother left grand qiequ Dulongqi (左大且渠都隆奇)³⁰ enthroned the right sage beg Tuqitang (右賢王屠耆堂) with the title Woyanqudi Chanyu without gathering the kurultai (HS: 94A: 3789; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 50). Woyanqudi gave authority and power zhuanqu yanzhi's brother Dulongqi.

Heqin as an External Factor

Shi Ji introduces Liu Jing (劉敬) as founder of Heqin policy³¹. *Cefu Yuanguai* includes a brief history of Heqin from beginning to Tang times. According to this narrative, Heqin was direct result of Baideng incident³². In this respect that would be useful to pay attention to Liu Jing's Heqin advice in *Shi Ji*:

“After siege was lifted and Gaozu returned from Pingcheng, Han Wang Xin defected to Hu. At that time Modu was chanyu. His army was strong. More than 300 thousand. They raided the borders several

³⁰ When Xulüquanqu Chanyu enthroned, the left grand qiequ was yanzhi's father. Since the left grand qiequ was yanzhi's brother, when chanyu died, yanzhi's father presumably died before Xulüquanqu. This is an evidence that certain positions belonged to certain families (Ercilasun, 2019, p. 125).

³¹ His real name was Lou Jing (婁敬). Before Gaozu was besieged at Baideng, Lou Jing opposed to attack Xiongnu forces. Because he realized that Modu hid his powerful army. Gaozu arrested him by anger. He realized he made a mistake after being besieged. Released Lou Jing and gave him his surname Li. Furthermore, bestowed Marquis of Jianxin (建信侯) title (SJ: 99: 2718).

³² After a brief introduction, Heqin Account of *Cefu Yuanguai* describes Han Gaozu's anxiety about the Xiongnu threat. Many centuries later the Baideng incident, story of origin of Heqin policy is the same with *Shiji*'s narrative. CFYG: 978: 11317

times. The Emperor got worried and asked Liu Jing for advice. Liu Jing said: ‘Under the heaven just settled in. Armies disbanded. It is impossible to recruit them, yet. Modu killed his father, took his wives as his own. He built up his power by force. He cannot be persuaded by righteousness. Only his descendants would be persuaded to submit to Han in long term. But I am afraid your majesty could not do it.’ Emperor said ‘It may be feasible. But how to do it?’ Liu Jing replied: ‘If your majesty can marry the eldest princess born by the empress to him as his wife and give him rich gifts, he is going to know that Han princess will bring riches, Man and Yi people will love the princess as yanzhi. The birth to a son who princess will give will be the heir, and then chanyu. How so? Because They are greedy for Han coins. Your majesty send Han surplus to Xiongnu every year, send people with silver tongue to enlighten them; while Modu is still alive he will be [your majesty’s] son in law. When he died, chanyu will be [your majesty’s] grandson. How could you ever hear that a grandson stand against his grandfather? The army can gradually subdue [the Xiongnu] without going to battle. If your majesty is not able to send his eldest princess, he can send a royal woman or a concubine to pretend to be the princess. If he understands he will not approach her and it will be not beneficial.’ Gaodi said ‘good.’ He decided to send eldest princess. Empress Lü wept day and night saying ‘I have only a prince and a daughter. How can I send her to Xiongnu?’ Finally unable to send the eldest princess, emperor found a girl from the family, pretended she was the eldest princess and sent her to chanyu as his wife.” (SJ: 99: 2719)

The author of *Han Shu*, Ban Gu’s commentary on Heqin:

“The idea of Heqin is suggested for the first time by Liu Jing. At that time, under the sky [China] was just settled. Due to difficulties he met in Pingcheng, [Han ruler Gaodi] tried to make a Heqin treaty and sending gifts to chanyu, hoping to settle peace on the northern front by following his advice. In the reigns of Xiao Hui and Gao Hou, Xiongnu raids on the front didn’t stopped and the chanyu became even more arrogant. In the reign of Xiao Wen, border markets were opened, daughters of Han were sent [to chanyu] as wives, quantities of gifts were increased to 1000 golden pieces per year. However, the Xiongnu violated the treaty for many times and border regions suffered by their hands. So, in the middle of the Wen’s reign, a new policy was suddenly emerged. [Emperor] wore military uniform, mounted on his horse and gathered strong soldiers

from noble families of six administrations and trained them for riding and shooting in Shanglin to prepare for battle. Gathered elite soldiers and deployed his army in Guangwu. Consulted with Feng Tang and discussed how to lead the army. [Because] he clearly understood that heqin treaty was useless by thinking ancient statesmen.” (HS: 94B: 3830-3831; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 93)

Liu Jing thought marrying to a Han princess was going to captivate the chanyu and he would appoint Gaodi’s grandson as his heir. The grandson was going to be obedient to his grandfather, the Xiongnu would do the same. This naive plan based on the idea that the Xiongnu was in greed for Chinese riches, so they would be easily manipulated by sending gifts. He didn’t consider the Xiongnu as a rival empire that has its own political institutions and traditions. Describing northern people as beasts was a common view in China since Zhou era (Lien-sheng, 1967, p. 24-26; Di Cosmo, 2004, p. 93-97). This thought tend to underestimate China’s neighbors. But it wasn’t idealistic at all. While representing the Xiongnu as greedy bandits Liu Jing also suggested to found equal relationship between two rulers. He was aware of Modu’s power. That was his main reason to find a way to deal with the Xiongnu without battle.

Maybe Liu Jing was the founder of heqin relationship between the Han and the Xiongnu, but making peace with marital relations was not something new, neither for China nor for the steppe. In third century BC, these kind of diplomacy was already traditional (Ercilasun, 2019, p. 205). Marital ties between aristocratic families strengthened their alliances. Heqin was a form of adaptation of domestic alliances like the ones within the Xiongnu Empire. Problematic nature of this policy lies there. It is possible to unite several families in a single state organization around common interests, but when it comes to relations between two states, it is not easy to tie the two royal families around common interests. Heqin definitely is not just about chanyu marrying a Han princess. The treaty includes Han sending annual tribute to Xiongnu and two rulers’ becoming brothers. But the important aspect of the treaty in terms of subject of this study is marriage, and did not meet Liu Jing’s expectations.

Chen Zijing concludes Liu Jing’s plan was not succesful, pointing out that although Chinese histories recorded all events about Heqin, there is no record whether there was a chanyu born of Han princess (Chen, 2007, p. 197). According to Lin Gan, Han Dynasty sent five princesses between 198-133 BC (Lin, 1986, p. 50-51; Lin, 2007, p. 45). But in fact there were six princesses. In 198 BC Liu Jing was sent by Gaozu to accompany the first Han princess to marry Modu Chanyu (SJ: 110: 2895; HS: 94A: 3754; Lin, 1984, p. 7). In 192 BC Empress Lü sent a princess to marry Modu Chanyu (HS: 94A: 3755; Lin, 1984, p. 9). In 179 B.C. after Wendi’s enthronement, a princess was sent to Modu Chanyu (HS: 4: 129; HS: 94A: 3756). In 174 BC Laoshang Chanyu enthroned, Wendi sent a

princess to marry him (SJ: 110: 2898; HS: 94A: 3759; Lin 1984, p. 11). In 160 B.C. heqin treaty was renewed (SS: 110: 2904; HS: 94A: 3764; Onat, et al., 2004, p. 22). In 156 BC Jingdi sent a princess to marry Junchen Chanyu (SJ: 110: 2904; Lin, 1984, p. 15). In 152 BC Jingdi sent another princess to marry Junchen Chanyu (Lin, 1984, p. 15). It is important that none of these princesses names were recorded. Most probably the Chinese people didn't need to record their names, because these princesses didn't played important role. In 33 BC Princess Wang Zhaojun married to Huhanye Chanyu. She has been the only Han princess married to Xiongnu Chanyu as far as we know. Huhanye's reign was a turning point for relations between two empires. He accepted Han supremacy and paid homage visits to Han court. At that time Chinese influence on the Xiongnu was strong. The Chinese expected Huhanye to appoint Wang Zhaojun's son as his heir, but he didn't. Even though his sons ascended the throne one from another, Wang Zhaojun's sons never got the chance. She even wanted to return to China (HHS: 89: 2941), but Chengdi rejected her request. One of her sons, Yituzhiyashi (伊屠智牙師), was the left sage beg at Huduershidaogao Chanyu's reign. Chanyu got him killed to appoint his own son as the left sage beg (HHS: 89: 2941).

The Chinese expected to gain control over the Xiongnu using Han princesses' sons. Despite the expectations not a son but a daughter played an important role. One of Wang Zhaojun's daughters, namely Princess Yimo, were married to Xubu Dang. She dominated court politics of the Xiongnu with her husband. As it's mentioned before, they had enough power to enthrone whoever they want and directly handle empire's foreign relations. They provided the Chinese some privileges, but Wang Mang's attempt to turn Xubu Dang into puppet Xiongnu chanyu was a fiasco.

Conclusion

Women played an important role in politics within a tradition that kinship relations was in the center of politics. Women's involvement in politics became more visible in historical sources when they caused a trouble. But in fact, they were always participated in politics mostly without causing any trouble. Marital ties between the dynasty and the noble families lasted more than 4 centuries. This persistent relations created long lasted political core of certain powerful families that kept empire alive. Yanzhi titles represented how the ties were strong between chanyu and her family. To enthrone her son was the most effective way for yanzhi to maintain her family's power and gain more power for herself. Conflicts within the dynasty members had a reflect on noble families. While leaders of noble families served to chanyu, certain nobles collaborated with rival princes. In this way rivalry within imperial familiy integrated with rivalry among members of noble families. Breaking the succession tradition gave way to new kinds of alliances. More branches of the dynasty and noble families gained opportunity to access political power by alliances.

Women participated politics without their own authority and responsibility. They shared their husbands' authorities or manipulated them. Using power by unauthorized people was a risky situation. Some yanzhis' irresponsible behaviors caused serious problems. But steppe political culture had an assurance; as long as the empire had the will to maintain its unity, the Kurultai became an institution where problems were solved or at least postponed. Even when the kurultai was left out by yanzhi to enthrone whoever she wants, new chanyu held his position. Gathering kurultai with limited participants was enough to appease dissatisfied people for a while. In time, new chanyu had opportunities to gain their trust. Otherwise, if yanzhi or new chanyu continued to act against common interests or made irresponsible choices, dissatisfaction turned into rebellion or civil war immediately.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar tarafından çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.

Destek ve Teşekkür: Yazar tarafından destek ve teşekkür beyan edilmemiştir.

Etik ve Bilimsel İlkeler Sorumluluk Beyanı

Bu çalışmanın tüm hazırlanma süreçlerinde etik kurallara ve bilimsel atf gösterme ilkelerine riayet edildiğini yazar(lar) beyan eder. Aksi bir durumun tespiti halinde Ege Üniversitesi Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi'nin hiçbir sorumluluğu olmayıp, tüm sorumluluk makale yazarlarına aittir.

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