

A City Adapting to the Mobile Government and Hybrid Culture Established by Khitan-Liao (907-1125): Up-Capital (Shangjing) and its Special Tent Zone

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Abstract : The Khitan-Liao dynasty (907-1125) was founded by the nomadic Khitan people and showed its peculiarities. This regime not only effectively ruled their own nomads, but also ruled the farming ethnic groups of the Han (汉) and others. It also controlled vast territories that included the northern border domains of China, East Asia, and even Central Asia. Different from the practice of other nomadic people, Khitan-Liao built settlement towns and cities on the Mongolia steppe from beginning of the dynasty, which made the politics, economy and culture of the steppe area develop significantly. In the process of cities' construction, Khitan-Liao set up five capitals respectively. Except three of them were rebuilt or expanded based on existing cities in agricultural areas, two new capitals were built, namely up-capital (Shangjing) and middle-capital (Zhongjing) in the steppe area. This article takes the up-capital (Shangjing) as an example to investigate a special zone in the capital for settling movable tents which adapted Khitan nomads, especially its nomadic government officials to live in. By using primary Chinese historical records and newly archaeological excavations, this article examines how the special tent zone used by the Khitan rulers, discusses how the Khitan-Liao manifested its hybrid cultural characteristics in urban planning, and its implications in studying the history of Khitan-Liao. The information, discussion and argument presented in this article are also worth considering the influence of urbanization of Khitan-Liao's urbanization on subsequent dynasties in pre-modern China and Inner Asia.

Keywords : cities on Steppe, special tent zone in cities, Khitan-Liao, hybrid culture

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