



Song capital Kaifeng during Huizong's reign, ca. 1110.  
Zhang Zeduan, "Along the River during Qingming festivals," 1110, Palace Museum, Beijing

## Qinzong Emperor: An Insignificant Emperor?

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The year 1126 CE, Jingkang,<sup>1</sup> the second year of Emperor Qinzong's reign, marked an important turning point in Chinese history. The Jurchen took the Northern Song Dynasty's capital, Kaifeng, by storm. Barbarian invaders captured the two emperors of the Song, Huizong and Qinzong. It was the first sacking of a Chinese imperial capital, and the first time a sitting Chinese emperor became a prisoner of the Northern Barbarians. Five thousand six hundred imperial family members were taken as hostages and forcibly brought to the northern Jurchen homeland.<sup>2</sup> The Two Song emperors, once leaders of the most powerful empire, were stripped naked and covered with goat blood while dancing in front of the Jurchen ancestral temple. The end of the Northern Song raises historical questions, especially about the most important man in these events: the

last emperor of the Northern Song, Qinzong emperor Zhao Huan.

Qinzong emperor Zhao Huan was an insignificant emperor who had only ruled for a year and a half, overshadowed by his famous father. When the Jurchens first invaded China in 1125, the young emperor temporarily united the already divided Song Court, with the command of great generals like Li Gang. This first defense against the Jurchen was successful. When the retired emperor Huizong, however, decided not to relinquish complete power to his son, he brought about a fractious and divided rulership, ultimately causing the Song's failure against the second Jurchen invasion in the following year.<sup>3</sup>

History has judged the Qinzong Emperor to be a failure. Some of the most important Chronicles of Qinzong's time on the throne suggest it was the emperor's failure to regulate or control his emotions

<sup>1</sup> The Era Name of the Qinzong emperor's reign. Jingkang means "Secure and Vigorous."

<sup>2</sup> Ke Gong, *The Records of The Song Captives*, 12<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>3</sup> See D. Wang, "The Overlord and the Political Situation in Jingkang year of the Northern song dynasty." *Master dissertation of Henan University*, 2013.

that resulted in his poor performance. The Chinese view of the emperor's obligation was to regulate his emotions and therefore balance the inner (family) and outer (officialdom) courts.

Zhao Huan is an interesting case study in the history of emotions. This approach is a good way to explore the nature of Chinese emperorship, Chinese political concepts of filial piety toward family, and obligations to state affairs, as well as the imperatives Confucian teaching had enforced upon the emperors.<sup>4</sup>

### *An Underwhelming Crown Prince*

The year 1100 was important in the history of the Northern Song. On one windy February night, the young and ambitious Zhezong emperor, Zhao Xu, suddenly passed away at twenty-four years of age.<sup>5</sup> In his fifteen years as emperor, the Song had witnessed extraordinary economic and cultural advances. With the long-lasting peace between the Chinese and neighboring barbaric kingdoms, like the Khitan Liao and Tangut West Xia, the Song empire reached its peak of prosperity and peaceful social development. Memoirs of that time described the Song capital Kaifeng as a city that never sleeps, with many night markets open from afternoon to midnight, countless shops specializing in exotic dishes and drinks, and extensive periods for holidays and festivals.<sup>6</sup>

The new emperor of China was the younger brother of the late emperor, Prince of Duan, Zhao Ji, later known as the Huizong emperor. Two months after Huizong took the throne, his wife, Empress Wang, gave birth to their first son - the later Qinzong emperor Zhao Huan (who would be the last emperor ruling from the ancestral capital of Kaifeng).<sup>7</sup> The young prince did not have a normal childhood. His mother, Empress Wang, married Huizong when she was only sixteen by an arrangement ordered by the Emperor. She quickly lost Huizong's favor when he took the throne and appointed several new imperial consorts.<sup>8</sup> Empress Wang passed away in 1108 at

twenty-five. Zhao Huan, who was only eight, had lost the person he loved the most.

At fifteen (in 1115) Zhao Huan, as the first son, was named Crown Prince. When Zhao Huan was growing up in his Eastern Palace, he had little contact with his father and other family members. His father, with 131 different imperial consorts, 31 sons, and 34 daughters, had little time for his son. The Eastern Palace was the solitary residence for the Crown Prince, located outside of the imperial palace. Unlike all other imperial children, allowed to live inside the imperial palace with their mothers until the age of marriage, the Crown Prince lived in confinement. No one could gain access to the Eastern Palace without direct order from the Crown Prince or the emperor himself. The people in Zhao Huan's life were mostly his teachers, who only taught him Confucian classics, training him from a young age. Confucian virtues, so it was thought, were to make him a great emperor, under the tutelage of his eunuchs.



Unknown Imperial painter, 12<sup>th</sup> century, Official court portrait of Qinzong emperor Zhao Huan (1100-1161, r. 1126-1127), National Palace Museum, Taipei

<sup>4</sup> See more about Chinese emotional history and filial piety in Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Toqto'a, *History of Song*, Book 18 (1343).

<sup>6</sup> See more about social development in Huizong-period Kaifeng in Yuanlao Meng, *Eastern Capital: A Dream of Splendor* (1187).

<sup>7</sup> Toqto'a, *History of Song*, Book 23.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 242.

Huizong was neither a good father nor a good emperor. He spent most of his time in producing and enjoying the arts. He personally sponsored the Imperial Art Bureau, which trained students to become professional artists, and the Imperial Garden Bureau, which collected exotic rocks and flowers for the emperor's imperial garden. As a fabulous painter and calligrapher himself, Huizong was one of the most important figures in the advancement of Chinese arts, whose style later artists imitated. Besides being a great artist, Huizong also loved to live in extreme opulence—luxury items of the finest artisans filled his palace, and he had a special zoo with exotic animals from overseas.<sup>9</sup>

Zhao Huan was a son with little similarities to his father. Huan was not artistic nor did he enjoy a life of luxury.

“When the emperor (Zhao Huan) was in the Eastern Palace, he performed no act which resulted in losing his great virtues, he had no profound interest and talents in music and art.”<sup>10</sup>

His father had a reputation for careless spending, while Zhao Huan was honored, and “his principle of frugality and respectfulness spread throughout the realms.”<sup>11</sup> When Huizong's most trusted and corrupted official, Cai Jing, offered a gift of a well-made Arabian glass vase as a bribe, the Crown Prince was furious, calling such a gift a tool of corruption and ordering that it be destroyed.<sup>12</sup>

Huizong had also shown an unexpected favoritism toward his younger son, Prince of Yun, Zhao Kai. (Kai inherited the same artistic talents from his father). Huizong allowed Kai to travel freely in the imperial palace. When Huizong offered banquets for his important officials, like Cai Jing or Tong Guan, Kai was always present, while the Crown Prince was missing. This imbalance of favor emboldened Kai to spread rumors that he would be the new Crown Prince.<sup>13</sup>

Zhao Huan was clearly aware of the danger of losing the title of Crown Prince, but he had little

support at court. Ultimately, he chose to become more passive and nearly invisible. He was cautious at every turn. Huizong nevertheless became more suspicious of Huan, and even executed Huan's personal eunuch for alleged conspiracy.

Zhao Huan was therefore not special in his father's eyes, and from early on the son was an outcast. Having lost his mother and closest servants, Huan developed a sense of emotional dislike toward his father. Moreover, Huan lived in constant fear of losing power to an ambitious brother, while his father seemed not to care. Huan became timid and cautious, and his earlier court life influenced his later reign.



Painting and calligraphy work by Huizong emperor, 12<sup>th</sup> c., Palace Museum, Beijing

### *An unwanted throne*

The Song's power was in decline in the late Huizong era. Rebellion in the south had weakened the Song's economy and military. As a counterbalance, there was a rising opportunity in the north when the Jurchens, a semi-nomadic tribe, declared Independence

<sup>9</sup> See more about Huizong emperor in P. Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Toqto'a, *History of Song*, Book 23.

<sup>11</sup> Li Gang, *Memories of JingKang*, 12<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous, *Song Shi Quan Wen Xv Zi Zhi Tong Jian*, Book 14, 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>13</sup> Zhuxi, "Teachings of Zhuxi," Book 130, 140 (1270).



from the Liaos. The Jurchens founded a new dynasty, the Jin, taking territory from the once powerful Khitan Liao dynasty.

Huizong seized this opportunity, betraying a hundred-year peace agreement with the Liao. He decided to make an alliance with the Jurchens and attack the Liao from the south, aiming to take back the You and Yun provinces in the north and regain control of the Great Wall territory (which his great founding ancestors, like Taizu and Taizong, failed to do one hundred years before). In 1125, when the Liao had finally been defeated, the Jurchens broke their alliance and immediately launched a full-scale invasion against the Song.

The Song, with a poorly trained army and corrupted generals in command, quickly lost battle after battle. Within a year, the Song had lost all of the newly gained territories to Jin. Jin encroachments reached Taiyuan, the only stronghold of the Song north of the Yellow River. With the surrender of an important Song general to Jin, the Jin army prepared to cross the Yellow River and march toward the Song capital, Kaifeng. Huizong now lost his nerve.<sup>14</sup> He appointed the Crown Prince Huan as governor of Kaifeng, while he escaped to the south. One fearless middle ranking official of the Imperial Rituals Bureau, Li Gang, wrote a memorial to Huizong in his own blood.

“Letting the Crown Prince act as Regent Lord is a ritual of the past. But now, when the enemy is a great threat, when our nation’s very survival is contained in a single breath, how can we still follow the old tradition? With no legitimate title to act as the ultimate commander, how can he command the empire? The Crown Prince will take the throne to protect the ancestral temple for your Majesty’s grace, collect and unite the loyal soldiers, fighting the enemy until death. Then the nation can be saved.”<sup>15</sup>

Officials like Li Gang formed a party within the court, putting pressure on Huizong to give up the throne. On midnight of December 26, after Huizong had suffered a stroke, he finally signed the abdication order, using his left hand. The Huizong emperor, ruling China for 26 years, retired as “Lord of the Dao,” at 44 years of age. Huan ascended the Dragon throne the next day.<sup>16</sup>

In the early morning of December 27, Zhao Huan visited his sick father, with no knowledge of succession plans. When he walked to his father’s bed, officials rushed to him with the coronation order and imperial robe. Huan was not pleased. Crying, refusing the honor, he yelled at the officials, “if I accept such a title, I will not be filial.” Huizong called in his wife and Huan’s stepmother, Empress Zheng, to try to persuade Huan to take the throne. She begged Huan, “your father is sick, the livelihood of me and my husband all depends on you now.”

Despite desperate pleas from his parents, Huan refused a second time.<sup>17</sup> Huizong lost his patience and ordered the officials to carry Huan physically to the coronation ceremony. Huan resisted, attacking the officials who dared to touch him. In the tussle, Huan fainted and lost consciousness.<sup>18</sup> He finally woke up late at night, and Huizong again asked him to take the throne. Huan accepted.<sup>19</sup>

On December 27, 1125, there was a new emperor of China, Zhao Huan. Twenty-six years old, never having stepped out of the capital, he changed his name to Jingkang, “Secure and vigorous.”<sup>20</sup> From this point on, we can call Huan by his official, posthumous temple name, Qinzong, Venerated Ancestor of the Song. From the moment he became Crown Prince, he understood that someday all the empire’s wealth and glory would be his.

The emperor was the Son of Heaven and all of China his subject. When Huan refused to become the emperor of China, he must have been worried about the fragile state of the empire, whether the treaty with the Jurchens and peace would break down, and whether his father would become a competitor.

<sup>14</sup> Xu Mengshen, *The Records of the Three Emperors and Northern Events*, Book 25 (1194).

<sup>15</sup> Toqto’a, *History of Song Book*, 359.

<sup>16</sup> Xu Mengshen, *The Records of the Three Emperors and Northern Events*, Book 25.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Toqto’a, *History of Song*, Book 23.

### *A fearless general*

One week after Qinzong's taking the throne, on January 3, the Jin army crossed the Yellow River, marching toward Kaifeng. The young emperor decided to take up arms himself and lead the general defense of the capital.<sup>21</sup>

On the next morning, Qinzong received shocking news: Huizong had run away from the capital, his official explanation being that he was heading to a Daoist Temple in Huizhou to perform offerings to the Gods. Huizong's unannounced decision spawned skepticism and rumors in the capital.<sup>22</sup> Within two days, fifty-four officials abandoned their posts and ran away.<sup>23</sup> Qinzong was stunned and betrayed.<sup>24</sup> His father had fled, now the Lord of The Dao, no longer the emperor.

Qinzong assembled an emergency cabinet meeting, resolving that the Imperial Court should move to the south, Kaifeng should be abandoned. But Li Gang, now as the Minister of War, strongly opposed such an idea. He confronted Qinzong,

"I have heard that your majesty has been making decisions with the prime ministers on taking a southern trip to elude the barbarians. If that is true, then our ancestral temple will be in danger. Since the Retired emperor has given you the responsibility to protect our ancestral temple and the imperial throne, how can you abandon them all together?"

Qinzong fell silent.<sup>25</sup> After several rounds of debate, Qinzong made no final decision, but he appointed Li Gang as the Left Prime Minister and General Commander of the capital.

After taking a lunch break, one eunuch whispered to Qinzong, "the empress and her father have already left the city, how can your majesty stay?" Qinzong, already traumatized, again lost control of his emotions. He fell from his bed and began crying in front of all of his cabinet officials. Qinzong

said to his officials, "You people stop imploring me to stay, I will go to Shanxi province and raise an army to take back the capital at a later time, I cannot stay here now."<sup>26</sup>

Li Gang threatened to commit suicide in protest. After Qinzong's two brothers supported the emperor's decision, he demanded the return of the empress. The emperor said to Li Gang in private, "you have told me to stay, then I will give the full command of the army to repel the bandits. I order you not to make any mistakes in doing so."<sup>27</sup> However, the emperor still made no official statement.

On the next morning, when Li Gang again heard that the Emperor was leaving, he armed himself and went to the imperial palace gate, where he saw eunuchs packing things in the emperor's carriage. Not willing to let the emperor run away like a coward, Li Gang staged a *coup d'état*. Securing the palace with an armed guard, he made an inspirational speech in the name of the emperor, telling the soldiers that the emperor had ordered the execution of all deserters. Li Gang decided to defend the capital with his life. Li Gang then dragged the emperor out to make his first public appearance. The emperor, under strong pressure from the military, finally decided to stay.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning these events, our evidence comes from Li Gang's own memoir, *Memoirs of Jing-kang*. From official history chronicles, like "History of Song" and "Records of the Three Emperors," there is little to add. The evidence, such as it is, suggests that Qinzong was not psychologically stable. Within two days, the young and brave warrior became a mindless coward who could not make a straightforward decision.

His inner court clearly influenced Qinzong's mindset. After his father's escape, Qinzong lost his nerve for defending the city, and eunuchs played a role in his decision-making processes. Li Gang himself commented that Qinzong was "great in hard working ethics, but lacking true wisdom."<sup>29</sup> His knowledge of Confucian classics could not solve the

<sup>21</sup> Xu Mengshen, *The Records of the Three Emperors and Northern Events*, Book 27.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 27, 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 27, 28.

<sup>24</sup> B. Zhang, "Analysis of Jing Kang Internal Conflict," *Journal of Sichuan Normal University* (Social Sciences Edition), 2001.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Li Gang, *The Memorials from Jianyan era* (12<sup>th</sup> century).

immediate military threat. With a divided officialdom as a result of Huizong's sudden escape, Qinzong's court provided no effective solution, other than to flee to the South.

Li Gang, on the other hand, after his fearless confrontation with the emperor, quickly rose through the ranks. Within a month, he was promoted from a middle-rank ritual minister to the most powerful military leader in the capital. Southern Song Neo-Confucian scholar Zhuxi commented on Li Gang,

“who can we use other than him? Morale is low; no one wishes to step out to take the lead. There is only Li Gang, who does not fear death, and he is the only one who is reliable.”<sup>30</sup>

By staying in the capital, Li Gang used military force to ensure the emperor's personal safety. Qinzong entrusted full command to Li Gang. With Huizong's faction out of the capital, Qinzong and Li Gang were able to unite the Song courts and protect the city from the Jin's first siege of Kaifeng, albeit with severe casualties.<sup>31</sup> This all changed, however, when the immediate military threat ended, and Qinzong's paranoia towards his father began to influence his decisions on how to deal with the Song court.

#### *A Troublemaker: the Retired Emperor*

When Huizong escaped from the capital unannounced, Jurchens threatened and attacked Kaifeng. At the time, Huizong and his party were making their way southwest to the Yangtze River. Upon Huizong's departure, Qinzong purged Huizong's officials and began to consolidate his own power. First to fall was Wang Fu, Prime Minister and close friend, who was stripped of his post and executed on a charge of corruption. Then another powerful and high-ranking eunuch, Li Yan, who worked for Huizong for two decades, was executed on the same charge.<sup>32</sup> Fears arose of a reign of terror, and mass de-

sertions ensued (with a third of the officialdom abandoning its post without authorization).<sup>33</sup> The majority went south to Huizong's moving court along the Yangtze River. Some were important military leaders. Tong Guan, the general commander of the “Long Lasting Victory Army,” refused Qinzong's appointment to defend the capital, leading his army to protect the retired emperor.

When Huizong abdicated, he promised Qinzong that he would not intervene in policy. He had shown a humble attitude when he wanted to be called the “Lord of The Dao,” rather than the official title of “Senior Emperor.” He held out that he had decided to retire from politics and focus on his personal religious beliefs. When Huizong suddenly ran away from the capital, Qinzong had even written an imperial edict to cover his father's cowardice. Qinzong still had some trust in his father at the beginning, leaving him and his moving palace alone. Qinzong's attitude towards his father changed when military generals stopped following his orders. In fact, they refused to aid the capital Kaifeng under siege by the Jin in early January.

These military leaders remained with Huizong, who now moved his temporary court in Zhengjiang, near the end of the Yangtze River. Huizong began to act as the emperor of the south, sending out three imperial orders within a week. In one decree, he ordered that all official documents from the southern provinces not be sent to Kaifeng, but to Zhengjiang. He prohibited military leaders from crossing the Yangtze River, and stipulated that no supplies be sent to Kaifeng from the southern provinces.<sup>34</sup> Rumors spread that Huizong would declare himself Emperor in Zhengjiang, thus creating two separate imperial courts.<sup>35</sup> In Kaifeng, eunuchs stole and kept Qinzong's imperial orders for reinforcements, instead of sending them out to the local generals. Three such cases occurred in just one week, most likely at the behest of Huizong.<sup>36</sup>

Huizong's motives are a matter of speculation, but under his command, no reinforcements went to Kaifeng to aid his son, and wherever he went,

<sup>30</sup> Zhuxi, *Comments of Zhuxi*, Book 127.

<sup>31</sup> D. Wang, “The Overlord and the Political Situation in Jing-kang year of the Northern Song dynasty,” *Master dissertation of Henan University*, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> P. Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014, 435.

<sup>33</sup> Xu Mengshen, *The Records of the Three Emperors and Northern Events*, Book 30.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 43.

<sup>35</sup> Toqto'a, “History of Song Book,” 472.

<sup>36</sup> Xu Mengshen, *The Records of the Three Emperors and Northern Events*, Book 32.

he collected local taxes for building his temporary palace in the south, controlled the local promotion system, and began to handle daily governmental matters for the southern provinces from his temporary palace. By such actions, Huizong was indeed creating a new, separate imperial court, placing Kaifeng in critical danger, with a shortage in both military personnel and food for the winter. What the retired Emperor had done in the South greatly challenged the power and supreme leadership of Qinzong. Although Qinzong was cowardly when dealing with the Jin invasion, he had shown no sense of forbearance in the power struggle with his father. Qinzong openly announced several times that Huizong only had authority in dealing with Daoist religious matters. With Kaifeng under siege, his orders were ineffectual, in any event.

#### *An Unfilial Son*

With peace negotiations taking place between the Song and Jin, Qinzong felt the time was right to call his father back. In Qinzong's mind, Huizong was now illegitimate, as there was only one emperor. Yet Huizong was Qinzong's father, and Confucius taught that a son should give total obedience and respect to his father. Filial piety was the foundation of Chinese society. Taizu, the first emperor of Song, "established the dynasty with the teaching of filial piety." All Song emperors ended their honorary temple name with the character Xiao (filial piety). How, then, was Qinzong to deal with his troublesome father?

Qinzong first eliminated officials of Huizong's faction; six of Huizong's most trusted and powerful officials became the "six traitors."<sup>37</sup> Under Qinzong's supervision, the "six traitors" were scapegoats responsible for Huizong's acts. Huizong's temporary court quickly lost its widespread support. Four of the "six traitors" were executed; the other two died in exile. With most of Huizong's faction out of the way, Qinzong's personal power was supreme, and his personal friends, some with little experience, rose at court.



Unknown painter, Official portrait of Li Gang, 13<sup>th</sup> c. Source: Baidu images

Qinzong pressured Huizong to return as an act of filial piety: physical distance made it difficult for Qinzong to serve his father.<sup>38</sup> For Qinzong's own reputation, Huizong had to come back to Kaifeng. Qinzong ordered Li Gang to monitor the safe return of Huizong. Qinzong also wanted to wrest power from Li Gang and regain control of the military.

After several rounds of discussions between the two emperors on matters involving living expenses and rituals, Huizong finally agreed to return to Kaifeng. On the very day of Huizong's return to the capital, Qinzong prohibited Huizong's personal eunuchs from seeing him, and all of Huizong's personal guards joined Qinzong's own troops. The retired emperor walked into a trap, which left him powerless.<sup>39</sup>

When Huizong was under house arrest in Kaifeng, division between father and son was acute. Qinzong appears to have been emotionally exhausted, and he failed to manage his inner court. Qinzong ordered Confucian scholars to go to Huizong's palace every day and reeducate the retired emperor in Confucian classics. This may be an act

<sup>37</sup> Liang Zhongliang, *Huang Song Tong Jian Chang Pian Ji Shi Ben Mou*, Book 148 (13<sup>th</sup> century).

<sup>38</sup> P. Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014, 440.

<sup>39</sup> Li Gang, *Writing of Li Gang*, Book 172, Yuelu Mountain Press, 2004.

of humiliation, since those classics are for young children. The son was educating his father in virtue and goodness.<sup>40</sup>

Beginning in early April, officials were required to make daily reports of Huizong's daily activities. All of Huizong's interlocutors were interrogated, and gifts to Huizong were investigated by the secret police.<sup>41</sup> Huizong only made one public appearance, on May 13, one month after his return. Qinzong himself rarely and briefly visited his father.<sup>42</sup> Qinzong also declined several requests from Huizong to go to Luoyang, or to local temples for prayer. Qinzong closed any chance for Huizong to escape his supervision. In letters, Huizong even called himself "an old and dumb person," and his son "Your majesty, the grace," a reversal of the language of filial piety.<sup>43</sup> It was to no avail. Qinzong ignored his father's letters. On October 10, Huizong's birthday party, Huizong offered a cup of wine for his son as an act of kindness, but Qinzong refused to drink it, in front of all. Qinzong suspected poison, so much had he lost basic trust in his father. Qinzong refused to give Huizong any opportunity to rebuild the relationship. Huizong returned to his palace in shock and tears.<sup>44</sup>

Qinzong hardly treated Huizong according to Confucian ideas on filial piety. Huizong's constant interference at court led to Qinzong's tragic decision about his father. The Jurchens could be bought off, but not Huizong. The tragedy was interpersonal, but also built into conceptions of Chinese emperorship. There could be only one emperor, and that fact precluded cooperative efforts of Qinzong and Huizong as co-rulers.

We can never know what kind of inner struggles Qinzong underwent, but Qinzong's emotional reactions are clear to see. He broke all the rules of filial piety. Gaozong emperor, brother of Qinzong and the only remaining Song imperial clan member after Qinzong's captivity, commented, "The father

and son had different plots and second thoughts about each other."<sup>45</sup> More importantly, Qinzong's fears about his father extended to the outer court and deeply affected his relationship with his officials, leading to the end of his reign.

#### *A delusional ruler*

Qinzong was not a decisive ruler. In constant paranoia regarding his family members, he later decided to put all of his family members under house arrest,<sup>46</sup> and no court information was sent to any other imperial family members. Before the Jin army had broken into Kaifeng, Huizong and other impartial family members were unaware of the invasion. Qinzong was therefore uncommunicative with both his family and his officials. In one year, Qinzong had more than twenty-six Prime Ministers.

After Qinzong placed Huizong and other family members under house arrest, he purged potential supporters of Huizong, including Li Gang, the official responsible for his rise to power and the savior of his empire against the Jin. Qinzong's court was divided: he preferred appeasement of the Jin; Li Gang promoted a military solution. As early as February, when the Jin army first arrived near the capital, Qinzong temporarily suspended Li Gang from government affairs in order to negotiate peace with them. There were mass protests in the streets in support of Li Gang.<sup>47</sup> Qinzong relented.

Qinzong feared Li Gang's success and popularity. After Huizong was under control, Qinzong ordered Li Gang to be the new governor of Taiyuan, a prestigious position. But Taiyuan was still under siege. Li Gang understood Qinzong's motives, but obeyed and tried to stabilize Taiyuan. When Li Gang was on route to Taiyuan, the Jin took the city. Qinzong used this as a pretext to abolish Li's post and sent him into exile in the south, because of his "inability to carry out the emperor's order."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Anonymous, *Memorials of Song Officials*, Book 10, 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>41</sup> Xu Mengshen, *Records of the Three Emperors and Northern Events*, Book 47.

<sup>42</sup> P. Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014, 446.

<sup>43</sup> Xu Mengshen, *The Records of the Three Emperors and Northern Events*, Book 47.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 57.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 177.

<sup>46</sup> Zhao Gou, Qinzong's brother, then was the leading diplomat to the Jin and went to the West provinces to call for reinforcement. When Kaifeng fell to the Jin, he became the next Emperor, known as Gaozong.

<sup>47</sup> Xu Mengshen, *The Records of the Three Emperors and Northern Events*, Book 33.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 56.





Song dynasty after the Jin invasion of 1126. The capital was re-located to Lin'an and lasted until the Mongol invasion in 1279.  
Source: Wikimedia commons

Li Gang's banishment was one of the most delusional acts of Qinzong. In his mind, Li's achievements threatened his supreme leadership. The official collection, "History of the Song," composed during the Yuan dynasty by Mongols, commented that the end of Northern Song was a direct result of Li Gang's exile:

"By Li Gang's virtues and achievements in the Jing'ang and Jianyan period, if he had enjoyed all support, how would the Two emperors be taken to the north? How would the Song have to retreat to the south?"<sup>49</sup>

The Jin invaded again, putting Kaifeng under siege in late November; this time, with no retired emperor as overlord and no strong military generals. The result was that Qinzong destroyed his empire by his own foolish decisions. With chaos and disorder in the capital, Qinzong first dealt with his family. Imperial guards returned the retired Emperor to the Imperial Palace; Qinzong killed most of Huizong's eunuchs.<sup>50</sup> Despite pleas from all quarters, Qinzong

prohibited anyone from leaving Kaifeng. He expected that the Jin army would not survive the harsh winter. Moreover, reinforcements were heading to the capital.<sup>51</sup> But with no great generals in the capital, Qinzong finally realized that he needed Li Gang.

Qinzong summoned Li Gang, but his action was too late. On a cold and windy December day, showing uncharacteristic bravery, Qinzong visited a city gate under Jin attack.<sup>52</sup> Qinzong, never a religious person, began to ask for advice from the Daoist communities. He ordered a Daoist master to be his general, to open up a city gate under direct attack by the Jin army, believing the supernatural would somehow defeat the Jin. The city fell.<sup>53</sup>

The Jin did not attack the inner city immediately, but wanted the retired emperor Huizong to negotiate peace. In response Qinzong cried out, "The Emperor father is sick with fear, let me go myself!"<sup>54</sup> He named his ten-year old son Regent Lord during the parley, passing over his father. The Jin imprisoned Qinzong. The Northern Song dynasty ended January 10, 1127, Jing'ang second year.

#### *A failed emperor*

In the classic Confucian text, *The Book of Documents*, a kind of handbook for emperors, we read:

"He (the Sage king) becomes able, virtuous, and distinguished, and loves the nine classes (families) of his kindred, who all become harmonious. He also regulates and polishes the people of his domain, who all become brightly intelligent. Finally, he unites and harmonizes the myriad states of the empire."<sup>55</sup>

The emperor, a man represented as being most virtuous, should emulate his predecessor. The imperial family should be a model family for all others. Yin and Yang balances all, with Yin as the Family and Yang as the society. Qinzong, with his inner family court, failed the Confucian model miserably. He

<sup>49</sup> Toqto'a, *History of Song*, Book 359.

<sup>50</sup> Wang Zao, *The important events of Jinkang*, Book 14, 12<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>51</sup> Wang Zengyu, *Kaifeng's fall and resist in near end of Northern Song*, Hebei University journal press, vol. 3, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Toqto'a, *History of Song*, Book 23.

<sup>53</sup> Xu Mengshen, *Records of the Three Emperors and Northern Events*, Book 69.

<sup>54</sup> Toqto'a, *History of Song*, Book 23.

<sup>55</sup> Confucius, *Books of Documents*, 1.1, 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

never overcame the emotional distress caused by his dysfunctional relationship with his father, and this led to his delusional and unenlightened rule. The paradox of Qinzong's reign was that he had been inculcated so thoroughly in the Confucian classics as a youth, but he was unable to implement their precepts in practice. For a man in his position, this led not only to personal tragedy, but also to disaster for his empire and his people.

Qinzong failed to regulate his emotions in dealing with his father, and his constant fear, paranoia, and untrustworthiness led him to a series of irresponsible policy decisions. Qinzong acted from a rigid idea that he was the only Son of Heaven; there was no room in his mind for Huizong, as the retired emperor, to have any role in ruling the empire.

The system of the Senior emperor, it must be conceded, was never well established in the two thousand years of Chinese imperial history. In the Chinese ideology of emperorship, the emperor has supreme power. Huizong, unwilling to relinquish power, presented his son Qinzong with a dilemma. Qinzong lived in his father's shadow for most of his life, and the retired emperor held the moral high ground of fatherhood and lordship in Confucian relationships. The impasse broke Qinzong emotionally, and led to the destruction of the Northern Song.

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