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# History or legend: An Analysis of the Historical Sources of the Refusal of Tang Taizong's Arranged Marriage by Lu Dongzan and Other Events Recorded in Li Deyu's Postscript of Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy

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**Abstract:** A post script written by Li Deyu on the “*Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy*” (步辇图) records events such as Tang Taizong's appointment of an official position and arrangement of marriage to Lu Dongzan, as well as Lu Dongzan's refusal to accept Tang Taizong's arrangement. The historical source of these events is not the *Annals of Emperor Taizong* verified by Fu Xuancong and Zhou Jianguo but rather the “Legend of Tang Taizong's Nine Tests of Tibetan Welcoming Envoys,” which Li sent people to collect during his tenure as the Jiedushi of Xichuan in Jiannan. Later, it was included in his book *Record of Defending the Southwest Frontier*. This legend became popular because of the deification and reshaping activities of Lu Dongzan and his sons during their period of monopolizing power. As a result, the series of events recorded by Li Deyu in his postscript were able to enter the “Tibetan Biography” of orthodox historical books such as *Old Book of Tang*, *Tang Huiyao*, *New Book of Tang*, *Zizhi Tongjian*, *Zizhi Tongjian Kaoyi*, and *Cefu Yuanguai*, becoming the so-called “true and credible history.”

**Keywords:** Li Deyu; Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy (步辇图); Emperor Taizong of Tang; Lu Dongzan; Tubo

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## Introduction

The *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy* (步辇图) is currently housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing. On the left side of the painting, there are 14 lines of inscriptions and postscripts written in small seal script. It is said that they were copied by Zhang Boyi, a Song Dynasty scholar. This postscript mainly records the appointment of official positions and arrangement of marriages by Emperor Taizong of Tang to Lu Dongzan, Lu Dongzan's refusal of Emperor Taizong's arrangement, and Emperor Taizong's insistence on finding a marriage partner. Fu Xuancong and Zhou Jianguo conducted research on this postscript from nine aspects, including historical information and sources of historical materials. They believed that the earliest version of the postscript was written by Li Deyu, and the source

of historical materials was the *Annals of Emperor Taizong* 《太宗实录》 [1]. The work of the *Annals of Emperor Taizong* is currently the most authoritative research in the academic community on the source of historical materials for this section of the postscript. Its logical reasoning includes two main aspects: first, there is temporal information, such as year, month, and day, in the *Annals of Emperor Taizong*, and there is also information on the timeline of events in the postscript; second, the content of the postscript is consistent with that of the *Zizhi Tongjian* 《资治通鉴》 and *Old Book of Tang*. This article proposes that the logic of the above argument is unreliable.

- The temporal information in the postscript and *Annals of Emperor Taizong* is the same, which can only prove the authenticity of the time of events and some historical facts about the events but cannot prove that all the historical facts are true;
- Li Deyu attached great importance to compiling historical books and had a high level of historical literacy. It seemed possible to construct an unreal history for other purposes, and it was difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood;
- Li Deyu wrote the postscript earlier, so there was also a possibility that it could become a source of historical materials such as the Old Book of Tang.

In addition, there are three main concerns about the source of the historical materials in this postscript. First, compared to the *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy*, Yan Liben's brother Yan Lide's "Princess Wencheng's surrender to Tibet" may be more in line with the official narrative tradition of using images to record history. This matter is recorded in the *Art and Literature Annals of the New Book of Tang* [2], and it is speculated that it was created by Yan Lide according to the orders of Emperor Taizong of Tang. However, this work has been lost. According to the painting title, it is speculated that the depicted content should be scenes of Princess Wencheng bidding farewell to Emperor Taizong or Empress Tang or Prince Li Daozong of Jiangxia escorting Princess Wencheng with talismans. Analyzing the relationship between Tang and Tubo before and after the 15th year of the Zhenguan reign (641) and comparing scenes depicted in the Palace Museum's *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy*, Yan Lide's perspective may be more in line with the orders and historical logic of Emperor Taizong of Tang.

Second, Shen Congwen doubted the authenticity of the author of the *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy* and the events depicted in the painting: he believed that the clothing of the characters matched and did not match the clothing of the early Tang Dynasty, and it was also possible that they pieced together from the surviving *Night Tour of Emperor Yang* 《炀帝夜游图》 and *Official Tribute Painting*. Even if the initial version was created by Tang Dynasty people, it was considerably later than Yan Liben's time. This may have been completed after the completion of the "Seven things to do while walking" (蹀躞七事) or even after the Kaiyuan or Tianbao period [3]. Third, based on the multiple incidents of the Tang Dynasty and neighboring ethnic separatist regimes and alliances that occurred around the 15th year of the Zhenguan reign (641), it can be inferred that this postscript does not conform to historical logic.

In December of the thirteenth year of the Zhenguan reign (639), Princess Honghua married the king of Tuyuhun and Murong Nuohebo. In June of the 14th year of the Zhenguan reign (640), the king of Xue Yantuo sent envoys to propose to the Tang Dynasty [4]. In the sixth month of the seventeenth year of the Zhenguan reign (643), King Xue Yantuo once again sent envoys to the Chang'an to propose marriage [5]. Orthodox historical books such as the *Old Book of Tang* either do not mention the envoys involved in the aforementioned events at all or simply mention them, even if their status is higher than that of Lu Dongzan. For example, there is no record of the details of the meeting with the king of Tuyuhun and the son of the elder brother of the king Xue Yantuo. It is extremely rare to provide a detailed description of the engagement of Princess Wencheng by Lu Dongzan or to place Lu Dongzan in an absolute protagonist position. In addition, by retrospectively inserting the event "Lu Dongzan refusing the marriage arranged by Emperor Taizong of Tang" after the period of Emperor Gaozong of Tang, when national affairs were entrusted to Lu Dongzan for handling [6], this approach is clearly inconsistent with the writing style of *Tibetan Biography in the Old Book of Tang*, *New Book of Tang*, and *Tang Huiyao*, which all adopt a chronological style. This special narrative strategy suggests that this historical material may have been revised later on rather than sourced from the *Annals of Emperor Taizong* or from the history of the current dynasty.

All the above doubts call into question the authenticity of the *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy* and the authenticity of the information recorded in the postscript. This paper advocates going back to history and puts "Ludongzan's refusal of Tang Taizong's marriage arrangement and other events" in the historical context of that time, examining and distinguishing the sources of these historical materials from a historical logic perspective.

## Analysis of Postscript Content

### Emperor Taizong of Tang Appointed Lu Dongzan as a Right Guard General

Li Deyu's postscript recorded the appointment of Lu Dongzan as the Right Guard General by Emperor Taizong of Tang and Lu Dongzan calling himself a minister. This article believes that this information does not conform to historical logic, and the analysis is as follows:

First, Songtsen Gampo had previously proposed to the daughter of Emperor Taizong of Tang. Only after the absolute victory of the Tang Dynasty in the war against Tubo did Emperor Taizong agree with his request and refer to Songtsen Gampo as his son-in-law [7]. Songtsen Gampo also accepted this relationship and referred to himself as a servant [8]. Furthermore, based on the historical fact that Emperor Taizong of Tang appointed Murong Nuohebo, the king of Tuyuhun, as the Prince of Heyuan County (河源郡王), Emperor Gaozong of Tang appointed Songtsen Gampo as the Commander of the Imperial Guard (驍馬都尉) and the Prince of the Western Sea (西海郡王) [8], it can be inferred that during the reign of Emperor Taizong of Tang, the political status of Tubo was much lower than

that of Tuyuhun. It can be inferred that Emperor Taizong of Tang did not appoint Lu Dongzan as an official.

Second, at that time, Tubo was not a territory under the rule of the Tang Dynasty or a frontier prefecture but rather a relatively independent national separatist regime. According to convention, appointing the Prime Minister first without appointing Zanpu (赞普) not only violates national etiquette but also implies political turmoil. The following two events support the above inference. First, the *Old Book of the Tang Dynasty* recorded that Emperor Taizong ordered the Minister of Rites, Li Daozong, the Prince of Jiangxia Prefecture, to escort Princess Wencheng to Tibet and preside over the wedding with a rune [7]. The rune is evidence that the Tang Dynasty sent envoys to visit the surrounding ethnic separatist regimes.

Third, a similar incident occurred in the 18th year of the Kaiyuan era, but the outcome was completely different. The high-ranking official of Tubo, Ming Xilie, came to the Tang Dynasty to arrange a peace treaty. Emperor Xuanzong of Tang was welcoming to Ming Xilie and treated him with kindness and generosity, rewarding him with items such as a purple robe, gold belt, and fish bag. However, he firmly refused to accept fish bags, arguing that "Tubo does not have fish bags, so I dare not accept them [9]." At that time, the relationship between Tubo and Tang was a nephew and uncle relationship, and the fish bag implied the meaning of submitting to the Tang Dynasty. The implied meaning of not accepting it was to refuse to submit to Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. The reward Emperor Xuanzong offered and his reaction to the rejection of the gifts, as well as a series of subsequent events [10], demonstrated that both of them tacitly recognized this kind of nephew uncle relationship. When Lu Dongzan came to welcome Princess Wencheng, the relationship between Tang and Tubo was not yet clear, and even Ming Xilie understood that their relationship was complicated. As the prime minister, Lu Dongzan was aware of the dynamics of Tang and Tubo's diplomatic relations.

## **Emperor Taizong of Tang Arranged Marriage for Lu Dongzan**

Li Deyu's postscript also recorded events such as Emperor Taizong's arrangement of marriage for Lu Dongzan. This paper suggests that this matter also does not conform to the logic of implementing the pro-peace policy during the early Tang Dynasty. The analysis is as follows:

First, from the eighth year of the Zhenguan reign (634) to the fifteenth year of the Zhenguan reign (641), Songtsen Gampo made three successive requests to Tang Taizong for a marital alliance with a princess, and after eight years, he finally succeeded. Three years after the great victory in Songzhou (638 in the twelfth year of the Zhenguan reign) and the arrival of Lu Dongzan, the princess arrived in Chang'an, and the process can be described as extremely tortuous. It is unfathomable that Lu Dongzan, who was the prime minister, was able to arrange a marriage so easily.

Second, after his great victory in Songzhou, Songtsen Gampo had withdrawn his troops and sent envoys to apologize to Emperor Taizong of Tang. Given that both sides had reached an agreement on the border issue, there was no reason for the arranged marriage to Ludongzan. Furthermore, based on Princess Wencheng's status as a royal woman and

discussions between Tang Taizong and ministers such as Fang Xuanling regarding Xue Yantuo's invasion and rebellion [11], Tang Taizong could not easily betroth the princess to a king of a neighboring ethnic separatist regime, let alone a minister. Based on this analysis, the belief that Emperor Taizong of Tang took the initiative to arrange a marriage without Zanpu proposing for Lu Dongzan or Lu Dongzan himself proposing is unfounded.

## **Lu Dongzan Refused Tang Taizong's Arranged Marriage**

Li Deyu's postscript also recorded information such as Lu Dongzan's refusal of Tang Taizong's arranged marriage proposal and Tang Taizong's continued insistence on marriage. This article suggests that this may also be untrue. The analysis is as follows:

First, Lu Dongzan bears the heavy responsibility of welcoming and escorting Tang Dynasty princesses. In addition, he was wise, skilled in strategy, possessed a firm and resilient character, and conducted himself with dignity [8]. If he refused Tang Taizong's order for personal reasons, Tang Taizong's displeasure would inevitably ensue, which would affect the completion of the task of welcoming the princess. Therefore, the likelihood of him refusing Tang Taizong's orders is low.

Second, in the postscript, Lu Dongzan described himself as a "minister," "servant," and "paying respect" to the princess, revealing a clear tendency toward self-deprecation. The above words are all expressions of confession and reporting from humble or young people to respected elders. Lu Dongzan was so humble and submissive how could he intentionally do something that goes against the orders of Emperor Taizong of Tang?

With Li Deyu's outstanding talent, abilities, and rich historical knowledge, he most likely discovered the truth about why Lu Dongzan's rejected Emperor Taizong's marriage proposals. So why did he still write it in the postscript? In the article *Metaphor and Revelation: A Study of Li Deyu's Inscription and Postscript on the Bu Nian Tu*, the author has explored the reasons why Li Deyu remounted the *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy* and inscribed it on the screen:

*The postscripts are not a memory of the Taizong meeting with Lu Dongzan approximately 200 years ago but rather an expression of the political humiliation he suffered two years ago; moreover, the postscripts also indicate Li Deyu's experience when he served as Jiannan Xichuan Jiedushi and the frontier policy he advocated. Specifically, the content of his postscripts may not only reveal the pain he felt at the time but also give historical legitimacy to his frontier policy. The postscripts reconstructed the events shown in the Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy painting seem to imply that his handling of the surrender of Weizhou followed the principles and strategies of Taizong; However, emperor Wenzong, Niu Sengru and Li Zongmin betrayed those who surrendered and caused them to be tortured and killed, which violated the strategy established by Taizong of how the empire controlled tributary states. In other words, Li Deyu's postscriptions of the "Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy" painting took advantage of past events in the Taizong Dynasty and of policy applied to the*

*kingdom of Tibet as a metaphor. While subtly reflecting on the era of Tang Wenzong, one may assume what caused the incident involving the demise of the surrendered general, known as Xida Mou, in Weizhou city. Furthermore, self-justification should be provided for these actions. [12]*

## Path of “Lu Dongzan Refusing Tang Taizong’s Arranged Marriage and Other Events” Entering the Orthodox History Book

Li Deyu is very familiar with the geography, customs, products, culture, and other knowledge of Tubo. During his tenure as the Jiedushi (节度使) of Jiannan Xichuan, he gathered knowledge of border affairs; personally visited mountains, cities, and roads; and wrote a thirteen-volume *Record of defending the Southwest Frontier*, mainly recording information about tribes, mountains, cities, cities, roads, transportation, and enemy situations in Sichuan and Tubo. It is believed that the postscript may have been taken from the legend passed down by Tubo at that time, which states that Emperor Taizong of Tang tested the Tibetan envoys nine times before welcoming the family of the bride into the city.

Sa Rentuoya believes that the legend of Emperor Taizong of Tang testing the Tibetan envoy nine times originated much earlier than the earliest recorded *Zhujian Shi*, 《柱间史》 [13] which appeared in the form of theatrical performances in the late 7th and early 8th centuries. The legend, on the other hand, originated in the mid to late 7th century and was based on the true historical event of Songtsen Gampo marrying Princess Wencheng [14]. The emergence and spread of this legend in the Tibetan region may be related to the deification and reshaping of Lu Dongzan by Lu Dongzan and his sons after monopolizing power [6]. Li Qinpu believes that this legend not only indicates that Lu Dongzan was smarter than people from other ethnic separatist regimes but also metaphorically suggests that at that time, only the intelligence of the Tubo people could compete with that of the Tang Dynasty [15].

This perspective can also be seen in the descriptions of Tang Tibetan relations in ancient Tibetan language documents such as *Zhujian Shi*. “At that time, the Tang Dynasty (also known as Dashi, Turkic, and other countries) often sent envoys to ‘pay tribute’ to the Tubo people [16].” This can also be seen in the letter written by Songtsen Gampo to Emperor Taizong of Tang: “If you insist on refusing to betroth the princess to me, my incarnation army will conquer your land [17].” This paper also suggests that only Lu Dongzan himself and his sons shape him as the protagonist of history. The findings of this article can be mutually verified with those of Sar Rentoya, Li Qinpu, Bai Guisi, and others.

The author speculates that the path through which events such as Lu Dongzan’s rejection of Tang Taizong’s arranged marriage and others entered the orthodox historical records are as follows: during the reign of Emperor Wuzong of Tang, Li Deyu managed the central government, supervised the compilation of the current dynasty’s history, and submitted the *Record of Defending the Southwest Frontier* containing the legend of “Tang Taizong testing the Tibetan welcoming envoy nine times” to the emperor for review [18]. As a result, the *Record of Defending the Southwest Frontier*, along with the reframed *Emperor Taizong*

*Receiving the Tibetan Envoy*, were preserved in the Jixian Hall Academy or Historical Museum and became one of the sources of historical materials for writing the *Wuzong Shilu*. Lu Dongzan's refusal to marry was also included in orthodox historical books such as the *Old Book of Tang*, *Tang Huiyao*, *New Book of Tang*, *Zizhi Tongjian*, and *Zizhi Tongjian Kaoyi* [19]. Cefu Yuanguai 《册府元龟》, edited by Wang Qinruo (962-1025), also recorded this incident, and its wording was almost identical to that of Li Deyu's postscript. In his *Annals of the Spring and Ming Dynasties*, Song Minqiu (1019-1076) recorded that the *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy* was once collected at Wang Qinruo's home [20]. Therefore, the author believes that the record in *Cefu Yuanguai* can be derived from this postscript [15].

## Conclusion

The events recorded by Li Deyu in the postscript to *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy*, such as Emperor Taizong's appointment of marriage and official positions for Lu Dongzan and Lu Dongzan's refusal to accept Emperor Taizong's marriage arrangement, are not real events that have occurred throughout history. Among all the events mentioned above, the historical source of Jia Xu in the spring of the 15th year of the Zhenguan reign should be the *Annals of Emperor Taizong* or the history of the current dynasty. The other sources of historical information are not related to the *Annals of Emperor Taizong* but rather come from the "The legend of Emperor Taizong of Tang testing the Tibetan envoys for nine times" collected by Li Deyu during his tenure as the Jiedushi of Xichuan in Jiannan, which was later included in the *Record of Defending the Southwest Frontier* and became the Book of Two Tang Dynasties, One of the sources of historical materials for the Tibetan Biography in *Tang Huiyao* and *Zizhi Tongjian*. The record of Cefu Yuanguai is different from the orthodox historical books mentioned above and originates from Wang Qinruo's copying of the postscript on the painting scroll of *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy* collected at home. The popularity of the legend of Emperor Taizong of Tang for testing Tibetan envoys nine times in the Tubo region is related to the deification and reshaping of Lu Dongzan by Lu Dongzan and his sons during their period of monopolizing power. The reason Li Deyu wrote this postscript was related to Xi Damou's surrender. Through the postscript, he subtly expressed his intention to explain the injustice and reward those who sacrificed their lives for loyalty to the country to the officials and the emperor.

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The author has no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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“禄东赞拒绝唐太宗指定婚姻”等事件, 在藏语文献中被称作“唐太宗九次考验迎亲的使者的传说”。最早见于《柱间史》第十一章《迎请文成公主》中, 还见于《底乌教法源流》《娘氏教法源流》《玛尼宝训集》《塘益》《贤者喜宴》等藏语文献中。至今, 这一传说在西藏民间仍广为流传, 并有相关的藏戏传世。《柱间史》又被称作《吐蕃赞普松赞干布传——遗训金鬘》或《松赞干布遗教》等, 主要记载吐蕃早期的王统和佛教法统、松赞干布的化身、丰功伟绩以及赤尊、文成公主等人的故事。《柱间史》成书的时间比较模糊, 大多数学者认为是 11-13 世纪。
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