

*A Herstory at the Frontier: The Archetype of Wang Zhaojun and the Overthrow of the
Isomorphism of the Family and State in the Tang era (618-907)*
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According to Chinese historiographies of the Han dynasty, Wang Zhaojun, a palace attendant at the Han court, married the tribal leader of the Xiongnu confederacy in 33 BCE and successfully developed kinship through marriage (*heqin* 和親) at the imperial command of Emperor Yuan of the Han dynasty (75-33BCE, r. 48-33BCE). Since then, many writers have expanded the brief descriptions of Wang Zhaojun and her experiences in the historiographies to support their own political and ideological causes. The Dunhuang manuscript P. 2553 written around the 9th century stands out in this genealogy of the Wang Zhaojun archetype for its variance with Han historical records. In this prosimetric text (a genre that mixes verse and prose) Wang Zhaojun becomes a sentimental, derelict diplomat indulgent in her love for the Han emperor and wastes her life away over her melancholia for missing Han culture. Yet, unlike the vague images in most of the literary pieces on Wang Zhaojun, here the foreign tribal leader turns out to be a devoted but frustrated romantic and eventually severs his connection with the Han after Wang Zhaojun's death. My paper, by analyzing the plot mutations of this Dunhuang text and the theme of women resisting the sovereign order prevalent in other Dunhuang manuscripts, investigates the literary transgression of the "isomorphism of the family and state." I maintain that this manuscript represents a "border perspective" prevailing in the multicultural Dunhuang area that challenges the mainstream Confucian culture of the Tang dynasty.