

A Study on the Phenomenon of Eyan in the Tang Dynasty as Reflected in Bai Kong Liu Tie

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Abstract. As a special type of rumor with popular influence and supernatural undertones, eyan (false rumors) in the Tang Dynasty possess the basic feature of being factually ungrounded and false. Based on Bai Kong Liu Tie, Tang eyan can be classified into four categories. An analysis of their timing, locations, and contexts shows that their emergence and spread were closely associated with social crises, religious superstition, information asymmetry, and power struggles. Meanwhile, the government's regulation was marked by a contradiction between strict legal provisions and ineffective governance. Eyan persisted despite repeated bans due to several factors: the rulers' sensitivity to chenyu (prophetic sayings), their monopoly over the interpretation of the Heaven-Human relationship, inconsistencies between rulers' personal superstition and official policies, uneven administrative capacity among officials, and the failure of control measures to address root causes. The phenomenon of eyan recorded in Bai Kong Liu Tie reflects both the ruling class's monopoly and control over information and the role of ordinary people in interpreting and spreading information in Tang society.

Keywords: Tang Dynasty, Eyan (False Rumors), Bai Kong Liu Tie

1. Introduction

Rumor, as a form of public opinion existing in both ancient and modern times, is inherently linked to collective cognition, cultural development, and state control. However, systematic research on rumor transmission worldwide did not emerge until World War II. Rumor is closely intertwined with social crises; studying the origin and spread of rumors in ancient China helps deepen our understanding of the operational mechanisms of traditional Chinese society.

Chinese scholars have produced abundant research on rumors in medieval Chinese history. In the field of Han-Tang history, they have established a detailed classification of rumors in the Han Dynasty [1]. Existing studies on Tang rumors focus heavily on chenyu (prophetic sayings) with political predictive implications [2], while research on eyan (false rumors) in the Tang Dynasty remains relatively scarce.

On the one hand, academia still lacks a systematic and holistic understanding of various types of eyan in Tang society. Some scholars have explored the origins and wide diffusion of specific eyan such as the "Chengcheng" rumor, the rumor of "burying infants under the Mingtang (Imperial Ritual

Hall)", and the "Holy Water" rumor, along with their political and social backgrounds [3]. Scholarship has only examined collective panic related to the context of eyan outbreaks.

On the other hand, although Han-Tang studies have categorized different types of rumors in ancient China, classical texts lack clear definitions of rumor, leading to frequent confusion among its subcategories. This conceptual ambiguity is a major difficulty to overcome in eyan research. Textual criticism of eyan sources helps clarify the core concept of eyan in the Tang historical context, reconstruct the social features of the Tang Dynasty through eyan, and fill an academic gap in the study of ancient Chinese rumors.

Taking "Yao E Jiu" in Volume 93 of Bai Kong Liu Tie as the core material, supplemented by Jiu Tang Shu (Old Book of Tang), Xin Tang Shu (New Book of Tang), Zizhi Tongjian (Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance), and other historical sources, this paper defines the concept and characteristics of eyan based on the Tang context. It further investigates the time, place, and causes of eight typical eyan recorded in Bai Kong Liu Tie, and analyzes the discrepancies between Tang legal institutions governing eyan and their actual implementation.

2. Eyan in the Tang Dynasty as reflected in Bai Kong Liu Tie

The term eyan first appears in The Book of Songs·Minor Odes·Mianshui: "The false rumors among the people—why are they not stopped?" This shows that as early as the Pre-Qin period, people recognized eyan and associated its spread with the common people.

Zheng Xuan, the Confucian scholar of the Eastern Han Dynasty, annotated: "E means false. When the age is disordered, base people delight in fraud and deceit; they spread malicious and provocative words, inciting resentment, yet no one restrains them."

Shuowen Jiezi does not include the character e, which is synonymous with wei (false). Although ancient texts recognized the falsity of eyan, they equated it with rumor in concept. Rumors in ancient China fall into five categories: liuyan (floating rumors), chenyu (prophetic sayings), yaoyan (monstrous words), geyao (ballads), and eyan. To clarify the concept of eyan, it must first be distinguished from other rumor types.

In Tang historical records, eyan is close to liuyan. Both are unverified but widely circulated among the public. They often arise when the government has not issued clear statements on certain issues. For example, the "Golden-Headed King" eyan in Bai Kong Liu Tie records: "Li Kuangwei remained in Shenzhou and sent his subordinate Li Baozhen to petition for an audience. At that time, the capital had suffered repeated invasions; everyone lived in fear. Rumors spread that the Golden-Headed King was coming, and people fled into the mountains."

In the absence of authoritative information channels, the spread of eyan and liuyan was strongly shaped by the subjective fears of transmitters caused by political instability or natural disasters. As Lü Zongli [4] noted: "Natural disasters and social crises most easily induce eyan among the people... Many eyan emerge and spread amid warfare and poor social order."

Gan De, an astronomer of the Warring States Period, regarded the spread of eyan as an ill omen:

"Signs of death appear, bandits run wild, false rumors spread, and fires break out in ancestral temples. The state shall suffer calamity. Advancing brings harm by fire; retreating endangers those with glib tongues" [5].

This awareness of the link between eyan and social crises continued into the Tang. For instance, the "Chengcheng killing people" eyan in the Zhenguan period is recorded in Jiu Tang Shu: "On the Gengchen day of the seventh lunar month in autumn, rumors spread in the capital that the emperor sent Chengcheng to take human hearts and livers to worship the Celestial Dog. People were

terrified. The emperor sent envoys to reassure the public, and the panic subsided after more than a month."

Another political eyan fabricated by Han Jian states: "At that time the emperor was in Huazhou. Han Jian, fearing that imperial princes would command troops, induced soldiers to accuse the princes of plotting to kill him. Later he spread false rumors that the princes planned to kidnap the emperor and move him to another military garrison. The princes, terrified, went to Han Jian to defend themselves."

Xin Tang Shu preserves many eyan accounts that emphasize popular transmission. One example is the rumor about burying infants under the Mingtang: "In the tenth lunar month of the twenty-seventh year of the Kaiyuan reign, when rebuilding the Mingtang in the Eastern Capital, rumors spread that officials seized infants and buried them under the Mingtang as a talisman. Children hid in valleys, the capital was in turmoil, and some claimed troops were approaching."

Another account records: "In the autumn of the third year of the Jianzhong reign, rumors spread across the Jianghuai region that a hairy man ate people's hearts, causing great fear."

Regarding the eyan about Zheng Zhu refining immortality pills, Jiu Tang Shu records: "In the ninth year of the Dahe reign, rumors spread in the capital that Zheng Zhu refined golden pills for the emperor, requiring the hearts and livers of infants, and that a secret decree was issued to arrest countless infants. People told each other privately, locked their infants tightly, and the streets were filled with anxiety."

Xin Tang Shu supplements: "People often whispered to each other: 'Several infants have been lost in such and such a place.' Alchemists claimed that golden pills could bring immortality, which was absurd and unreasonable."

Based on the above materials, eyan in the Tang Dynasty can be defined as a complex form of public opinion: factually untrue, widely influential among the people, colored with supernatural elements, and shaped by social crises, religious theology, and information asymmetry.

Eyan in Bai Kong Liu Tie fall into four categories: Eyan fabricated by regime founders; Panicked eyan amid social crises; Eyan demonizing government officials; Eyan fabricated in partisan struggles.

3. Textual research on eyan in Bai Kong Liu Tie

3.1. Eyan fabricated by founders of political regimes

This category of eyan was mainly spread by rulers to consolidate their governance. Such eyan usually carried certain religious overtones to expand their influence. In the section "Yao E Jiu" of Bai Kong Liu Tie, the records of "A Kong transformed into a man", "Deluding the public through heterodox doctrines", and "Deceiving the masses by pretending to be divine" conform to the characteristics of this category of eyan.

Deceiving the Masses by Pretending to Be Divine

"Dong Chang deceived the public by pretending to be divine. He first built a living shrine, carved a statue out of fragrant wood, and placed gold, jade, and fine silk inside as its internal organs. He sat wearing a royal crown; his wives and concubines waited in separate tents. Musicians played wind and percussion instruments before him, and soldiers stood guard at the gate. Prefectures under his rule presented clay horses at the shrine, offered animal sacrifices to pray, and it was falsely claimed that rewards would be given if the clay horses neighed and sweated. Dong Chang himself declared: 'If anyone offers sacrifice to me, I will surely become drunk.'"

This eyan was a political rumor fabricated by Dong Chang, a leader of separatist forces in the late Tang Dynasty, to serve his ambition of proclaiming himself emperor. Relevant records can be found in *Xin Tang Shu* and *Zizhi Tongjian*. Combined with the historical background of separatist forces in the late Tang Dynasty, the spread of this eyan can be analyzed.

In terms of chronology, *Bai Kong Liu Tie* does not clearly record the exact year of the incident, which falls in the critical period between Dong Chang's enfeoffment as a king and his proclamation as emperor. According to *Xin Tang Shu*, after Dong Chang was successively appointed as Grand Commandant with the rank of Inspector-General and Grand Councilor, and enfeoffed as Prince of Longxi, he began to engage in the act of "deceiving the masses by pretending to be divine". The time when he was granted the title of Prince of Longxi can be inferred based on the political sequence of the late Tang Dynasty: Dong Chang began to gain important positions after Emperor Xizong returned to the capital in 884 CE, and he officially proclaimed himself emperor and established the "State of Great Yue Luoping" in 895 CE (the second year of the Qianning reign). Therefore, the act of "deceiving the masses by pretending to be divine" should have occurred during the transitional period between his enfeoffment and enthronement.

Wanli Shaoxing Fu Zhi (Wanli Shaoxing Prefectural Gazetteer) [6] records the inscription on Dong Chang's living shrine: "Tianwang Temple is located at the foot of East Jishan Mountain. The characters carved on the mountain wall behind the temple state: 'Established on the 16th day of the 12th lunar month of the first year of Jingde of the Tang Dynasty.' This is the living shrine of Dong Chang." The gazetteer mistakenly transcribed "Jingfu" as "Jingde". However, combined with the historical context of the Tang Dynasty, it can be concluded that Dong Chang's living shrine was built around 892 to 893 CE.

In terms of location, *Zizhi Tongjian* records: "Dong Chang built a living shrine in Yuezhou", indicating that the incident took place in the area of Yuezhou. *Xin Tang Shu* notes that although Dong Chang was granted the title of Prince of Longxi, his main sphere of influence was in Yuezhou (present-day Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province), as evidenced by the stone inscription of Dong Chang's living shrine in Wanli Shaoxing Fu Zhi. As the political center of eastern Zhejiang in the late Tang Dynasty, Yuezhou had been governed by Dong Chang for many years. The fact that "soldiers stood guard at the gate" shows that Dong Chang had already used the living shrine as a political venue, so it can be inferred that the shrine was built in the core area of his sphere of influence.

3.2. Panicked eyan amid social crises

This category is the most representative type of eyan in the Tang Dynasty. Most of the eyan records in the Treatise on the Five Elements of *Xin Tang Shu* belong to this category. As stated in Chapter 1, social panic is a key factor driving the widespread spread of eyan. In "Yao E Jiu" of *Bai Kong Liu Tie*, the "Golden-Headed King" rumor about Li Kuangwei, the "Soldiers will rise among officials and nobles" rumor about Han Chaozong, and the "Yi Mother Ghost" rumor in Chengdu all fall into this category.

Golden-Headed King

"Li Kuangwei remained in Shenzhou and sent his subordinate Li Baozhen to submit a memorial, expressing his wish to enter the court. At that time, the capital had suffered repeated invasions and disasters, and everyone lived in fear. Rumors spread that the Golden-Headed King was about to arrive, so people fled and hid in the mountains" [7].

This "Golden-Headed King" eyan occurred during the reign of Emperor Zhaozong of Tang, triggering panic in the capital due to the warlord Li Kuangwei's attempt to enter the capital. Relevant

records are found in *Xin Tang Shu*, *Jiu Tang Shu*, *Zizhi Tongjian*, and *Tong Jian Ji Shi Ben Mo* (Collections of Essentials of Events in the Comprehensive Mirror).

In terms of chronology, both *Xin Tang Shu* and *Jiu Tang Shu* record that "the capital had suffered repeated invasions". Combined with Li Kuangwei's historical activities, as the military governor of Youzhou, Li Kuangwei was expelled by his younger brother Li Kuangchou in 893 CE (the second year of the Jingfu reign) and forced to flee to Shenzhou, after which he sent Li Baozhen to submit a memorial. Therefore, the rumor can be dated to 893–894 CE (from the second year of Jingfu to the first year of Qianning), during the reign of Emperor Zhaozong, when the central rule of the Tang Dynasty was on the verge of collapse and separatist forces fought most fiercely.

Geographically, *Xin Tang Shu* records that Li Kuangwei "remained in Shenzhou" and rumors in the capital claimed "the Golden-Headed King was about to arrive", involving two places: Shenzhou (present-day Shenzhou, Hebei Province, where Li Kuangwei was stationed) and the capital Chang'an. Shenzhou was the core area of Hebei's separatist forces, while Chang'an was the political center. The fact that the rumor triggered panic among the people of the capital reflects that in the late Tang Dynasty, marked by severe separatist rule, every move of military governors was likely to spark huge public opinions and accelerate the spread of eyan.

The common feature of such eyan is that they provide a "container" for the unplaced anxiety of the people during turbulent times. Amid social panic, people tend to attribute the outbreak of social crises to individuals, events, or ghosts and gods. No original "perpetrator" can be found for such eyan, but their spread is closely linked to social changes. When social crises emerge, public panic, stereotypes about certain things, and cognitive limitations exacerbate the distortion of information, which in turn further amplifies social panic.

3.3. Eyan demonizing government officials

The key feature of this category of eyan is fabricating negative images of government administration in content. Such eyan are also caused by the public's panic over social changes mentioned above. The eyan about Zheng Zhu "refining pills by cutting out infants' hearts and livers" recorded in *Bai Kong Liu Tie* also belongs to this category, but it is classified into the fourth category—"eyan fabricated in partisan struggles"—because it played a more prominent role in partisan conflicts.

There are numerous records of eyan demonizing the government in the Tang Dynasty. This paper uses eyan in *Xin Tang Shu* to clarify the characteristics of such rumors, such as the aforementioned eyan that "officials sent Chengcheng to kill people", and another eyan about "burying infants under the Mingtang" in *Xin Tang Shu*: "In the tenth lunar month of the twenty-seventh year of the Kaiyuan reign, when rebuilding the Mingtang (Imperial Ritual Hall) in the Eastern Capital, rumors spread that officials seized infants and buried them under the Mingtang as a talisman. Children in villages and wild areas hid in valleys, the capital was in turmoil, and some even claimed that troops were approaching. Emperor Xuanzong disliked this and sent envoys to comfort and reassure the people; the panic lasted a long time before subsiding."

This eyan exerted such a strong influence that its content even evolved into "troops are approaching", mainly for three reasons: First, the time-consuming and labor-intensive construction of the Mingtang aroused public discontent; the construction of ritual buildings required the concentration of labor, and the gathering of population led to the "group polarization effect" of information. Second, as an imperial ritual building, the Mingtang's sacrificial functions were inaccessible to the public—only the royal family had the right to worship heaven, which led to speculation among ordinary people about the building. Third, during the construction of the Mingtang, the emperor summoned craftsmen from across the country, and frictions between foreign

craftsmen and local residents may have intensified social conflicts and further fueled the emergence of eyan.

The demonization of the government stemmed from the information gap between the public and the ruling class. The Tang government monopolized the discourse power of interpreting the Heaven-Human relationship, making the public unable to understand the purposes of official religious acts such as sacrifices and the construction of the Mingtang, thus generating misunderstandings toward the ruling class. Against the background of the prevalence of witchcraft, such misunderstandings eventually manifested in the form of "demonizing the government".

3.4. Eyan fabricated in partisan struggles

This category of eyan is closely related to partisan struggles and is also common among Tang eyan. Compared with other categories, such eyan are highly politically purposeful. Since their fabricators were adept at exploiting public superstition, most of these eyan are tinged with supernatural colors. The eyan of "refining pills by cutting out infants' hearts and livers" and the "Clothless Child" in Bai Kong Liu Tie both belong to this category.

"In the second year of the Baoying reign, Pei Du requested to enter the court, which greatly frightened Li Fengji's faction. Zhang Quanyu fabricated a false rumor: 'The clothless child bares his belly; the mouth in heaven is expelled.' This referred to Pei Du's suppression of Wu Yuanji. There are six mounds stretching from east to west in the capital, which the folk regarded as the number of the Qian hexagram. Pei Du's mansion was located in Pingle Lane, facing the fifth mound. Zhang Quanyu then claimed: 'Pei Du's name corresponds to prophetic sayings, and his mansion occupies the mound plateau; he comes without being summoned, and his intention is obvious.' He intended to bring Pei Du down. Only the emperor could see through his slander."

This eyan occurred in 826 CE (the second year of the Baoli reign, Emperor Jingzong of Tang), a prophetic rumor fabricated by Li Fengji's followers to prevent Pei Du from entering the court. Relevant records are found in *Xin Tang Shu*, *Jiu Tang Shu*, *Zizhi Tongjian*, and *Xu Shi Shuo* (New Tales of the World) (Kong, Qing Dynasty).

In terms of chronology, *Xin Tang Shu*, *Jiu Tang Shu*, and *Zizhi Tongjian* all clearly mark the "second year of Baoli", and *Zizhi Tongjian* adds that "Pei Du requested to enter the court, which greatly frightened Li Fengji's faction". Combined with Pei Du's historical activities, Pei Du, as the military governor of Xingyuan, requested an audience with the emperor in the second year of Baoli, so the rumor occurred in 826 CE, a period of intense partisan struggles during the reign of Emperor Jingzong.

Geographically, although Bai Kong Liu Tie does not record the folk spread of this eyan, both *Zizhi Tongjian* and *Jiu Tang Shu* note that it "spread among neighborhoods", indicating its wide circulation among the people. The record that "Pei Du's mansion in Pingle Lane faces the fifth mound" confirms that the eyan spread in the capital Chang'an. Pingle Lane was a residential quarter in Chang'an where Pei Du's mansion was located. As *Xin Tang Shu* records, "there are six mounds stretching from east to west in the capital, which the folk regarded as the number of the Qian hexagram". Li Fengji's faction used this geographical location to attack Pei Du from the perspective of folk beliefs.

It can be seen from such politically framed eyan that political factions had learned to exploit public panic and superstition to design eyan conducive to suppressing rival factions for their own political goals. In the partisan struggles of the middle and late Tang Dynasty, eyan had been used as a political tool.

4. Legal provisions and actual enforcement governing eyan in the Tang Dynasty

Public opinion control was an important means of maintaining ruling order. According to the laws of the Tang Dynasty, as mentioned earlier, Tang rulers detested the spread of eyan intensely, so the penalties for eyan in the Tang were extremely severe. For instance, Tanglǔ Shuyi stipulates prohibitions against eyan: "All prisoners under heaven shall be promptly released and pardoned. The leaders of yao'e (monstrous falsehoods), bandits, and counterfeiters have deeply harmed state governance and must be duly punished. Those subject to the death penalty shall each receive one hundred heavy blows and be exiled to Lingnan for life. The remaining followers, who have been misled, shall be given moderate punishments in consideration of their ignorance, so as to serve as a warning" [8].

However, combined with the historical materials on the spread of eyan mentioned above, it can be seen that despite such harsh legal systems, the Tang Dynasty still witnessed numerous social panic incidents caused by eyan. This indicates that there was a discrepancy between the Tang laws on the dissemination of eyan and the actual handling of eyan, and this discrepancy constituted the loophole in the Tang regulatory system for eyan. The severe criminal control over yao'e in the Tang Dynasty aimed to consolidate the legitimacy of the regime and the orthodoxy of the dynasty.

Nevertheless, after the founding of the Tang Dynasty, tuchen (prophetic and talismanic) culture had penetrated the general public and all social strata, providing a social foundation for the spread of eyan. This social atmosphere of religious superstition was intensified by the founders of the Li-Tang regime, creating a contradiction with the strict public opinion control established after the Tang Dynasty. This contradiction gradually emerged during the development of the Tang Dynasty and was reflected in the rulers themselves. For example, regarding the eyan of "burying infants under the Mingtang" during Emperor Xuanzong's reign, four months before the outbreak of the eyan, Emperor Xuanzong had already issued an imperial edict:

"The sage kings of ancient times first prohibited heterodox doctrines, for they harmed governance; violations were surely punished. As for fortune-telling, groundless predictions of good or ill fortune, and fraudulent divination that deluded the people—pitying the ignorant, who were often deceived—laws shall be clarified to enforce rectification and punishment."

This shows that Emperor Xuanzong deeply detested spontaneous folk witchcraft, deeming it "groundless predictions of good or ill fortune," and ordered that "laws be clarified to enforce rectification and punishment." The issuance of such an edict before the "burying infants under the Mingtang" eyan also indicates that witchcraft was prevalent in Tang society at that time, requiring imperial edicts to curb its spread. Yet Emperor Xuanzong himself was deeply superstitious about witchcraft. Tong Jian Gang Mu (Outline of the Comprehensive Mirror) records that he left Luoyang on the grounds that "there were strange occurrences in the palace".

As mentioned above, Emperor Xuanzong issued the Edict on Prohibiting Monstrous Falsehoods in the third year of the Kaiyuan reign:

"Edict: Buddhism guides beings toward the true Dharma; benevolent kings uphold it and first eliminate heretical ways. Those who abandon its core tenets are sinners against Prajna; those who spread strange delusions can never be true believers in Nirvana. Without punishment and rectification, the path to salvation will be destroyed, and the ignorant will be trapped in pitfalls."

The theoretical basis of such an edict prohibiting monstrous falsehoods was actually derived from Buddhism, showing that Emperor Xuanzong applied religious thought to state governance. Furthermore, in the twenty-fifth year of the Kaiyuan reign, Emperor Xuanzong ordered the Minister of Ceremonies to throw golden dragons and white jade disks into wells, attempting to communicate

with mountain and water deities through Daoist rituals to consolidate the theory of the "divine right of kings". Emperor Daizong of Tang also intensified the promotion of Buddhism while strictly prohibiting prophetic texts.

To safeguard the rulers' authority, the monopoly of the right to interpret certain information was also one of the ruling strategies of the Tang government. For example, the Tang government monopolized astronomical knowledge: "The Sitan Observatory (Astronomical Bureau) forecasts disasters and blessings, and its work must be kept secret." To keep astronomical knowledge confidential, the Tang government prohibited the Sitan Observatory—responsible for divination, astronomy, and the calendar—from private contact with court officials and unauthorized persons, and assigned the Censorate to supervise the Sitan Observatory.

The Tang government's monopoly on the interpretation of the Heaven-Human relationship consolidated the "divine right of kings" but also deepened folk speculation about official actions. In the eyan of "burying infants under the Mingtang" under Emperor Xuanzong, the public demonized the official construction of the Mingtang.

Although the central government formulated a strict regulatory system for yao'e, local officials varied greatly in practical implementation. When the eyan that "a Kong transformed into a man" spread, local officials "acquitted and ignored the initial accusations," failing to curb the rumor in time and directly leading Zhang Shuyin to further expand its spread. By contrast, in the eyan of "deluding the public through heterodox doctrines," Ban Hong "investigated and executed the culprits immediately," quelling the eyan directly and maintaining stability in the border regions.

In another Tang eyan about the "Holy Water," Li Deyu's method of quelling the eyan was also highly efficient: "In the second year of the Baoli reign, it was reported that holy water emerged in Bozhou, and those who drank it were cured of illnesses. Li Deyu memorialized: 'I have learned that this water originated from wicked monks deceiving the people to extort money. For months, people south of the Yangtze River have flocked to it... If the root is not cut off, it will ultimately benefit no one. In the past, there was holy water in the Wu Kingdom, and sacred fire in the Song and Qi dynasties—all were absurd and condemned by ancients. I request your order to Linghu Chu, the military governor of this circuit, to block the source immediately to eliminate the root of evil.' His request was approved."

The solution proposed by Li Deyu was similar to Ban Hong's method: directly cutting off the source of the eyan to achieve rapid suppression. The divergent attitudes of Tang officials toward quelling eyan show that the handling of rumor crises in the Tang practically depended on the officials' own cognition and ability, which meant that the legal provisions governing rumors could not be implemented in specific local governance.

Both Li Deyu and Ban Hong directly addressed the transmission source of eyan during outbreaks. From Li Deyu's memorial, it is clear that he attributed the eyan to "wicked monks deceiving the people to extort money," so the key measure was to "block the source immediately" by filling in the spring that produced the "holy water." However, the root cause of this eyan was public fear of diseases in ancient times with underdeveloped medical technology. Instead of explaining the unscientific nature of the "holy water" to the public, Li Deyu chose to directly eliminate the people and media behind the eyan, driven by the need to safeguard Tang rule and the long-standing political sensitivity to "wicked monks deluding the public." Such an approach obviously failed to solve the fundamental problem, making it impossible to prevent various eyan from emerging at the source.

The Tang government's information control, which centered on safeguarding imperial power, was self-contradictory with its monopoly on the interpretation of "divine authority" related to astronomy and divination. Moreover, the immaturity of the official information release mechanism led to a lack

of authoritative information to calm the public during periods of rampant rumors and social unrest. Although the Tang had a "news report system," it did not evolve into a mature information transmission system, with an extremely limited readership.

The Song Dynasty developed on this basis and established official information release mechanisms such as the *dibao* (government bulletin), through which officials could learn about court affairs. Although such information was still influenced by imperial power, the system was more complete and reached a wider readership than those of previous dynasties [9].

5. Conclusion

Based on *Bai Kong Liu Tie*, Volume 93, "Yao E Jiu" as the core historical source, combined with *Xin Tang Shu*, *Jiu Tang Shu*, *Zizhi Tongjian* and other documents, this paper clarifies the distinctions between *eyan*, *liuyan*, and *yaoyan* in the Tang Dynasty. It defines Tang *eyan* as statements that are untrue in content, influential and widely spread among the people, and tinged with supernatural connotations. The paper classifies such *eyan* into four categories, conducts textual research on eight representative cases of *eyan* recorded in *Bai Kong Liu Tie* according to these four categories, and further analyzes the social features of the Tang Dynasty reflected in *eyan*.

From the perspective of the generation and spread of *eyan*, *eyan* is a projection of social mentality, and is closely associated with such factors as social crises, religious superstition, and oversights in official control in ancient society. In terms of social crises, political turbulence during the rise and decline of dynasties, as well as public fear of natural disasters and diseases in ancient society, aroused people's anxiety about the future and thus generated panic. This fearful mentality provided a breeding ground for *eyan* and also turned it into a tool that could be exploited in power struggles. In terms of religious belief, the Tang Dynasty adopted the parallel policy of taking Buddhism and Daoism as orthodox religions from its founding. The founders of the Tang utilized *tuchen* culture (prophetic and talismanic culture) with religious implications as a means to consolidate their rule, making *tuchen* culture penetrate all social strata. The outbreak of social crises further intensified the atmosphere of religious superstition, which rendered the content of *eyan* usually colored with supernatural elements, especially in *eyan* related to politics.

The regulation of *eyan* by the Tang government was marked by a contradiction between stringent laws and ineffective actual governance. *Tanglü Shuyi* (Tang Code with Annotated Interpretations) listed "yao'e (monstrous falsehoods)" as serious crimes, attempting to uphold the legitimacy of imperial power and social order through severe punishments. The government also maintained the authority of the imperial family by monopolizing the interpretation of the Heaven-Human relationship and banning witchcraft. However, in actual governance, the authorities often resorted to measures such as "issuing imperial edicts to comfort and reassure the people" to ease public panic only after *eyan* had developed into extremely serious social problems. Moreover, local officials varied greatly in their understanding and governance capacity regarding *eyan*, and a sound management mechanism for rumors was not formed from the central government to local regions. Rulers prohibited superstitious religious activities on the one hand but indulged in religious superstition on the other, which reduced the authority of public opinion control. Since the government's handling of *eyan* failed to address the root causes of its emergence, *eyan* persisted despite repeated prohibitions in the Tang Dynasty.

In summary, the study of *eyan* in the Tang Dynasty provides a unique perspective for understanding information transmission and social governance in ancient Chinese society. Although *eyan* exerted its major influence among the people, it was also a public opinion phenomenon generated by the interaction of all social classes. The understanding of *eyan* should not stay merely

at the level of public misinterpretation and distortion of information; instead, it is essential to recognize that behind eyan lie different interpretations of the same event by different social classes out of their own interests. Therefore, the study of eyan in the Tang Dynasty enables a deeper understanding of different social classes in Tang society and further dissects the developmental features of ancient Chinese society.

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