

A Review of Domestic Research on Zhang Dun in the Last Forty Years

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Abstract

In the past forty years, there have been a lot of domestic research results related to Zhang Dun, which has gradually formed a new hotspot in the study of the history of the Northern Song Dynasty. These studies mainly centered on Zhang Dun's attitude towards the succession of Emperor Zhezong, Zhang Dun's influence on the new deals, the party rivalry between Zhang Dun and the late Northern Song Dynasty, Zhang Dun's achievements in the process of opening up the frontier in the late Northern Song Dynasty, Zhang Dun's literary achievements, the relationship between Emperor Zhezong and Zhang Dun and the later generations' historical writing of Zhang Dun, etc. The field of study is constantly expanding, and the research methods are also greatly reformed. To be sure, there are still some permissible innovations in the future research on Zhang Dun.

Keywords: the past forty years, domestic, Zhang Dun, research review

1. Introduction

Zhang Dun, styled Zihou, was born in Pucheng, Jianzhou (today's Pucheng, Fujian). He was born in the second year of Jingyou of Emperor Renzong of Song Dynasty (1035) and died in the fourth year of Chongning of Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty (1105). He was an important prime minister in the late Northern Song Dynasty. Since the end of the Northern Song Dynasty, various historical records, both official and private, have made a variety of comments on Zhang Dun's personality and political behavior. Wang Fuzhi and Liang Qichao also commented on Zhang Dun in their respective works from the perspective of the historical background and the reform of the law in the middle and late Northern Song Dynasty. (Wang Fuzhi, 2008)

Since the reform and opening up, scholars in domestic academic circles have made increasingly in-depth studies on Zhang Dun, and a large number of research scholars and related works have emerged, which has become one of the hot issues in the study of the history of the Song Dynasty. According to the author's statistics, in the past 40 years, there have been about 15 relevant works and more than 70 relevant papers involving Zhang Dun in domestic academic circles.

On the basis of the existing research achievements, the author has made a brief review of the domestic research on Dun in the past 40 years. It mainly focuses on Zhang Dun's attitude towards the succession of Emperor Zhezong, Zhang Dun's influence on the new deals of Shaoshu, the party rivalry between

Zhang Dun and the late Northern Song Dynasty, Zhang Dun's achievements in the process of opening up the frontier in the late Northern Song Dynasty, Zhang Dun's literary achievements, the relationship between Emperor Zhezong and Zhang Dun, and the later generations' historical writing of Zhang Dun, etc. and evaluates and looks forward to it.

2. Overview of Research Achievements

(1) Studies on Zhang Dun's attitude towards the succession of Emperor Zhezong

As for Zhang Dun's attitude towards the succession of Emperor Zhezong, the academic circles have drawn several viewpoints of "having different plans", supporting and wait-and-see by citing and interpreting different historical materials. Wang Han put forward that Cai Que conspired with Xing Shu and Zhang Dun to appoint Prince Zhao Hao but failed. However, they accused Wang Gui and Empress Dowager Gao of having different agendas. (Wang Han, 1997) Xing Yong also believed that Zhang Dun and others had planned to establish Prince Yong or Prince Cao, in order to consolidate their power by virtue of their popularity. After the succession of Emperor Zhezong, they wanted to "offset the political influence until replacing Empress Dowager Gao" by honoring Emperor Zhezong's mother, and even falsely accused Empress Dowager Gao of wanting to take over the power of Emperor Zhezong. (Xing Yong, 2012) Chen Xiaojian pointed out that it was Wang Gui's persistence that thwarted "Cai Que's attempt to establish another crown prince with Zhang Dun and others" (Chen Xiaojian, 2015). Zhang Bangwei pointed out that although Zhang Dun "claimed to have the merit of establishing Emperor Zhezong", Emperor Zhezong was not appointed by Zhang Dun. However, Emperor Zhezong and Empress Dowager Xiang believed Zhang Dun's "merit of establishing Emperor Zhezong" to be true. (Zhang Bangwei, 2004)

As for the above opinion that Zhang Dun "had a different plan", Chen Zhen pointed out that the descriptions in the *Record of Emperor Zhezong (New Record)* compiled in the Southern Song Dynasty showed that Cai Que and Zhang Dun had a different plan. Although Li Tao quoted this record, he also pointed out the error in it to show that "it was Empress Dowager Gao and others who had objections to the succession of the Emperor Zhezong" but not Zhang Dun.

(Chen Zhen, 2003) Sun Xiaodong specifically pointed out that the conservatives' account of the incident had "severely distorted" the new party members, such as Zhang Dun, who supported the establishment of Emperor Zhezong, accusing them of conspiring to install King Yong Zhao Hao as emperor. (Sun Xiaodong, 2012) Sun Zejuan pointed out that both the conservatives and reform school had censored and altered relevant historical records, making it impossible for later generations to see the true nature of the incident. (Sun Zejuan, 2006) Zhang Jin believed that in order to eliminate the suspicions of the ruling and opposition parties, Zhang Dun and Cai Que decisively "unified the statement of the executive ministers" when Emperor Shenzong was dying, which made Emperor Zhezong appointed as the crown prince. (Zhang Jin, 2001) Wang Huayu cited the record in *The Long Complication of Continuing <History as a mirror>* that the reason why the position of Zhang Dun was difficult to be changed after Emperor Zhezong's ruling was largely because he "had discussed the appointment of the former Emperor (Emperor Zhezong) in front of the curtain at that time". (Wang Huayu, 2019) Wang Xian proposed that Zhang Dun had made a decision on the succession of Emperor Zhezong and was praised by the Empress Dowager Gao, but it was denied by Liu Zhi and other imperial historians. (Wang Xian, 2019) An Yiwen believed that it was the active operation of the members of the reform school, such as Zhang Dun, who opposed the establishment of Zhao Hao, the king of Yong, who did not support the new deals, that made the succession of Emperor Zhezong smooth. Later, however, Zhang Dun and others framed Wang Gui for not supporting Emperor Zhezong, in order to attack the conservatives and highlight their own achievements in supporting Emperor Zhezong. (An Yiwen, 2020)

In contrast to the above two views, Li Ling pointed out that Zhang Dun "could not make up his mind" on the question of Emperor Zhezong's succession. (Li Ling, 2011)

(2) Studies on the achievements and achievements of Zhang Dun's reform in the middle and late Northern Song Dynasty

Most scholars affirmed Zhang Dun's achievements in Emperor Shenzong's Dynasty. Huang Jinjun affirmed that Zhang Dun not only promoted the economic operation and management of the government, but also

strengthened the power of the reformists in the court and maintained the implementation of new deals. (Huang Jinjun, 2000) Zhu Yiqun put forward that in the late years of Yuanfeng, Zhang Dun not only had a deep understanding of the drawbacks of the new deals, but also “showed a positive attitude to harmonize the conservatives and the school of reform and adjust the new deals”. This is not only the strategy of “retreating to advance, striving for initiative” taken under the new political situation, but also may be carrying forward the intention of Emperor Shenzong in his later years to reconcile the conservatives and reform school. (Zhu Yiqun, 2017)

As for the debate between Zhang Dun and Sima Guang on the existence and abolition of new deals during the years of Yuanyou, most scholars affirmed Zhang Dun from the perspective of character and ability. Zhang Jin praised Zhang Dun for his outstanding performance in the struggle against Sima Guang’s strike against the abolition of the new deals “both justified and tactical”. (Zhang Jin, 2001) Luo Jiexiang affirms that Zhang Dun and others braved the political situation which had obviously reversed at that time and “put their personal political fate at risk” for the sake of the national economy and people’s livelihood. The debate also fully demonstrated the “strong and sensitive political ability, realistic political style and certain sense of social responsibility” of Zhang Dun and other members of the reform school. (Luo Jiexiang, 2002) Zhang Chengzhong affirmed that Zhang Dun’s criticism of Sima Guang’s claim of exemption from corvée was well-grounded and hit the key point, which was superior to Sima Guang in terms of right and wrong. However, in the political environment at that time, Sima Guang still defeated Zhang Dun by virtue of his superiority in moral identity and personnel position. (Zhang Chengzhong, 2021)

On the one hand, the academic circle recognized Zhang Dun’s achievements to a certain extent as to what he did for the new deals in Zhezong Dynasty. Chen Yujie affirmed Zhang Dun’s qualities of “being honest and upright for officials and being strict with himself” and his contribution to consolidating the state rule of the Northern Song Dynasty, and held that Zhang Dun was not a traitor minister like Cai Jing and Qin Hui. (Chen Yujie, 1983) Li Jimin affirmed that Zhang had always been a staunch figure in the reform, and was able to show no favoritism

during his reign, “from being considerate of the people to being fair and just in handling affairs”. (Li Jimin, 1988) Yuan Lujun affirmed that compared with the conservatives represented by Sima Guang, the reform school represented by Wang Anshi and Zhang Dun had a more active spirit, a more courageous sense of responsibility and a more pragmatic value orientation. (Yuan Lujun, 2015)

Of course, the academic circle at the same time generally pointed out the shortcomings of the new deals and Zhang Dun during this period. One important aspect was the criticism of the struggle between the reformists and the conservatives and among the reformists themselves. Shen Songqin, Zheng Daxin, Weng Guozhen, Huang Jinjun, Sun Xiaodong, Chen Chaoyang and other scholars affirmed Zhang Dun’s contribution to the further implementation of the new deals, but also criticized the reform school headed by Zhang Dun for its dedication to party struggle under the influence of the complicated and volatile political situation in the late Northern Song Dynasty, which made new deals of Shaoshu diverge from the correct direction of new deals of Xifeng and could not be compared with it. (Shen Songqin, 1998; Huang Jinjun, 2000; Sun Xiaodong, 2015; Chen Chaoyang, 2012) In addition, many scholars believed that in addition to the party struggle, the reform school headed by Zhang Dun also failed to achieve significant results due to its own problems. Qi Xia believed that new deals of Shaoshu were difficult to reach the level of the new deals led by Wang Anshi or even retrogressive because the reform school headed by Zhang Dun had made some compromises to the stubborn forces. (Qi Xia, 2001) Pei Rucheng and Chen Xiaoping pointed out that after Wang Anshi, Zhang Dun, Sima Guang and Cai Jing did not put forward “a set of new and brighter measures” to solve the basic contradictions still existing in the country after new deals led by Wang Anshi. (Pei Rucheng & Chen Xiaoping, 1985) Wang Han pointed out that the school of reform headed by Zhang Dun failed to save the financial crisis due to the lack of selfless spirit as well as the clear thinking of Emperor Shenzong and Wang Anshi, and even copied and expanded the malpractices in Yuanyou politics. (Wang Han, 1997) Luo Jiexiang believed that although new deals of Shaoshu also absorbed some advantages of Yuanyou government, but compared with Emperor

Shenzong and Wang Anshi, Emperor Zhezong and Zhang Dun, who put revenge in the first place, had a gap in the pattern of the relationship between emperor and minister. What's more, Zhang Dun and other members of the reform school had a great change "in the political enthusiasm, philosophy of life, subjective pursuit and other aspects compared to their past." "They also can't try their best to run for the national economy and the people's livelihood". (Luo Jiaxiang, 2002) Zhang Jin pointed out that members of the reform school, such as Zhang Dun, have gradually integrated into political reality in the power struggle, and their reformist and combative nature has been melting away. In addition, Emperor Zhezong and some members of the reform school, such as Zhang Dun and Cai Bian, also had the problem of excessively praising Emperor Shenzong and were rather dogmatic. (Zhang Jin, 2001) Zheng Zhiqiang also pointed out that the reformists headed by Zhang Dun not only compromised with the emperor and the conservatives, but also could not be compared with Wang Anshi in terms of personal ethics and political beliefs. (Zheng Zhiqiang, 2020) Zhang Xiaodui pointed out that the reform school headed by Zhang Dun had a significant problem of "doing well in the state's calculation but bad in improving people's livelihood". (Zhang Xiaodui, 2007) Cui Wenbin pointed out that the country is constantly changing around the new deals, which is "not good for the nation and people". (Cui Wenbin, 2010)

Some scholars have explored it from the level of political thought. Zhu Yiqun pointed out that Cai Bian's reinterpretation of "Shaoshu" with the help of the "national affairs" theory changed the "relatively rational tendency and tolerant style" of the early advocates of Shaoshu. In this period, the new theory of "Shaoshu" with the binary opposites of "good/evil" and "yes/no" provided strong theoretical support for Emperor Zhezong and Zhang Dun to strike down the conservatives and restore the new deals of Xifeng, and profoundly affected the historical process of the late Northern Song Dynasty. (Zhu Yiqun, 2017) Zhang Jiawei pointed out that the behavior of Zhang Dun and others who took Wang Anshi's scholarship as the basis of the political theory of Shaoshu instead "deepened the connection between Wang's study and the malpractice of government" among the scholar-officials. (Zhang Jiawei, 2021) The author

of *The Cambridge History of the Song Dynasty of China (Part I)* affirmed that the government led by Zhang Dun and other reformists had always been a "unified and powerful political force" with a high degree of discipline, and that Zhang Dun was not an extremist in ideology. (Cui Ruide & Shi Lemin, 2020)

(3) Studies on Zhang Dun and opening up the frontier in late Northern Song Dynasty

As for Zhang Dun's activities in navigating Jinghu area and Meishan during the Shenzong Dynasty, scholars generally gave a high evaluation and vindicated him on this basis. Huang Jinjun believed that for Jinghu area, Zhang Dun's management ended the long-term friction between the local nationality and the Han nationality, and also "did a lot of pioneering work for the establishment and management of minority areas". As far as the Northern Song Dynasty was concerned, it not only increased the fiscal revenue of the nation, but also promoted the stability and unity of the nation. (Huang Jinjun, 2000) Yuan Yuxiong believed that Cai Ye should not be credited for the development of Meishan, but Zhang Dun was the main person in charge. The measures taken by Zhang Dun to suppress and conciliate at the same time made him develop and manage Meishan successfully. (Yuan Yuxiong, 2006) Zhang Xiaodui praised Zhang Dun's achievements in operating Jinghu area and Meishan as one of the few military achievements in the Song Dynasty, which had special strategic value for the state centralization in the Song Dynasty and made the Jinghu area an important barrier against Mongolian attacks in the late Southern Song Dynasty. In addition, Zhang Dun's success did not stop at the military level. His economic and cultural development of the Jinghu area made the ethnic minorities in the southwest integrate into the cultural circle of the Central Plains, and also laid the foundation for the southward shift of the economic center of gravity in the Song Dynasty. (Zhang Xiaodui, 2007) Zhang Zehong's views largely agree with Zhang Xiaodui's and elevates the achievements of Zhang Dun's development of Meishan to the level of integrating the local area into the pluralistic and integrated pattern of the Chinese nation and providing a successful example for later generations to govern ethnic minority areas in southern China. (Zhang Zehong, 2017; Zhang Zehong, 2015) Tang Qingming also affirmed that Zhang Dun's development of Meishan promoted

the social and economic development and population growth of the ethnic minorities in Hunan. (Tang Qingming, 2012) Liao Yin discussed that Zhang Dun paid great attention to relying on the power of Buddhist temples and monks in the development of Meishan and Jinghu area, mainly taking Buddhist temples as military and intelligence bases and monks as lobbyists and other means to attract local people. All these methods played a very good role in promoting the opening up the frontier. (Liao Yin, 2014) Zhao Zhile put forward that, different from those traditional scholar-officials, the reform school headed by Zhang Dun strove to give equal treatment to Guiming and actively appealed to their leaders when they explored Jinghu area. (Zhao Zhile, 2016) Yu Bo affirmed that Zhang Dun's large-scale construction of stockades, fortresses and other institutions in the Jinghu area consolidated the Northern Song Dynasty's rule in the Jinghu area in terms of military attack and defense, litigation, trade and ethnic relations. (Yu Bo, 2020) Pu Sheng believed that Zhang Dun "had a great deal of experience in the affairs of opening up the frontier" and that the exploitation of Meishan allowed him to "acquire enough political capital to join the ruling ranks". (Pu Sheng, 2021) However, Zhang Dun's navigation of the Jinghu area was also criticized in some ways. Zheng Daxin and Weng Guozhen pointed out that Zhang Dun's actions of suppressing the insurrection of the savage minorities in the areas of Lu, Qia and Ding were stains in his life. (Zheng Daxin & Weng Guozhen, 1984)

Compared with the basic affirmation of the academic circle on Zhang Dun's exploration of the Jinghu area, it is difficult to generalize his achievements in opening up the frontier in Northwest China. Ma Li made a detailed analysis of the contrast between the two sides of the imperial court at that time, which were opening up or not, among which Zhang Dun advocated opening up. (Ma Li, 1989) Luo Jiexiang believed that the military achievements made by Emperor Zhezong and the reform school were unprecedented in the history of the Northern Song Dynasty, among which the war against Xi Xia was the most impressive. (Luo Jiexiang, 2002) The author of *The Cambridge History of the Song Dynasty in China (Part I)* praised the achievements of Emperor Zhezong in opening up the frontier, which had surpassed Emperor Shenzong in some ways, and had

projected "the hegemony of the Song Dynasty into Northwest China". (Cui Ruide & Shi Leming, 2020) As for the reasons why Zhang Dun was able to achieve the achievements of opening up the frontier in Northwest China, Tang Jun and Liu Qingquan praised Zhang Dun in terms of personnel. Tang Jun believed that the reasons why Lyu Huiqing could bear the humiliation under the distrust, suppression and even ridicule of Emperor Zhezong and his colleagues, and even made great achievements in the war against Xixia had a lot to do with the fact that Zhang Dun had fought for fair treatment to Lyu and supported him many times. (Tang Jun, 2015) Liu Qingquan affirmed the reform school's support exerted positive influence on Zhang Jie's accomplishments. (Liu Qingquan, 2021) Wang Zhanyang and YanYongcheng discussed the problem from the historical background together with the military and political system level. Wang Zhanyang pointed out that the case of Zhang Dun controlling the war against Xi Xia with sending private letters to border generals was a manifestation of "reshaping and improving the central military decision-making status of the Northern Song Dynasty" after Emperor Shenzong. (Wang Zhanyang, 2019) Yan Yongcheng pointed out that the practice of Wang Anshi in the years of Xining was followed by Zhang Dun. Both of them were the embodiment of the new imperial general system in the late Northern Song Dynasty, which was "selected by the prime minister who led the reform and appointed the border generals to open up the frontier who was fully supported by him", and Zhang Dun's military success was related to it. (Yan Yongcheng, 2017)

At the same time, the academic circle also pointed out the negative factors and negative influences in the process of opening up the frontier led by Zhang Dun. As far as the motivation of advocating the opening up the frontier is concerned, some scholars believe that Zhang Dun had hidden selfishness. Wu Shumin cited Zeng Bu's remarks in *The Long Complication of Continuing <History as a mirror>* to point out that Zhang Dun's intention of advocating the opening up of the northwest frontier to a certain extent had been "self-reinforcing". (Wu Shumin, 2019) Wang Huayu also believed that the fundamental reason for Zhang Dun's active promotion of the war against Qing Tang was that he needed to strengthen his power by "border affairs" after the war against Xi Xia.

(Wang Huayu, 2022) Pu Zhangzhen believed that the opening up of Hehuang area presided over by Zhang Dun had no strategic value, and the blind opening up caused the Northern Song Dynasty to expend a large number of troops and financial resources, and buried the hidden danger of subjugating the state. (Pu Zhangzhen, 2020) In addition, the academic circle also criticized Zhang Dun's practice of appointing people by favouritism and sending private letters to border generals when he presided over the opening up of frontier in Northwest China in Zhezong Dynasty. Qian Junling and Zhang Jingyan pointed out that in the period of Shaosheng, the occurrence of the "Bai Caoyuan meritorious fraud case" in which generals such as Zhong Chuan falsely reported their war achievements was largely due to the fact that compared with some officials who had a deep personal relationship with Zhang Dun and thus got rich rewards through political resources, Zhong Chuan, who had "neither a prominent family nor a powerful person to protect him", was inevitably unbalanced in his mentality and falsely reported his military achievements in order to obtain rewards. (Qian Junling & Zhang Jingyan, 2018) Wang Huayu believed that Emperor Zhezong and The Northern Song Court only acquiesced to Zhang Dun's sending private letters to border generals out of the consideration of evading responsibility and their own inferiority in mastering information, but what Zhang Dun did still exceeded the tolerable bottom line. Although this made him have a more thorough understanding of the situation of Qing Tang than other decision-makers, it also made him indecisive when making decisions, which had an adverse impact on the war. (Wang Huayu, 2022)

To these criticisms, some scholars debated from the perspective of political and military system of the Northern Song Dynasty. Huang Chunyan pointed out that under the political system of the Song Dynasty, such ministers as Zhang Dun and Wang Shao "could not independently carry out long-term, planned and successive activities of opening up the frontier", let alone be the decision-makers of the planning of opening up the frontier. Therefore, to ascribe the ultimate responsibility of opening up the frontier to these ministers is just a political explanation of "not responsible for the emperor". (Huang Chunyan, 2016) Yan Yongcheng pointed out that even under the new system of commanding generals

in the late Northern Song Dynasty, which "was recommended by the prime minister who led the reform and appointed generals who was fully supported by him to open up the frontier, Zhang Dun would still be suspected by Emperor Zhezong because the imperial power was still always on guard against the prime ministers' power. This new system of commanding generals is also often severely affected by "periodical party politics". (Yan Yongcheng, 2017)

(4) Studies on Zhang Dun and the Party Struggle in the late Northern Song Dynasty

Scholars generally hold a critical attitude towards the party struggles that Zhang Dun participated in in the late Northern Song Dynasty, believing that the continuous fierce party struggles seriously worsened the political ecology of the late Northern Song Dynasty and even accelerated the demise of the Northern Song Dynasty. In recent years, the academic circle began to break through the binary opposition model of political groups, and discussed from various aspects, such as character, political system and political culture. Using the class analysis method, Qi Xia pointed out that the reason for the internal division of Zhang Dun and other members of reform school, was that the small and medium-sized landlord class was able to join the ranks of the big landlords by supporting Wang Anshi's reform. The change of political and economic status prompted their thoughts to change, and then they quarreled with each other for power. (Qi Xia, 2001) Wen Xuanxuan further pointed out on Mr. Qian Mu's topic of the dispute between northern scholars and southern scholars in the Northern Song Dynasty caused by the social and economic development of the North and the South, customs and other factors had a profound influence on the party rivalry in the late Northern Song Dynasty. As a scholar in the South, Zhang Dun was therefore attacked by the biased and hostile northern officials and platform counsel officers. (Wen Xuanxuan, 2019) Yang Xiaomin pointed out that, of course, the character of "frank and open, hot temper, unfussy and no giving face to others" had made him many enemies, but all the contradictions between Cai Bian, Zeng Bu and Zhang Dun were in essence dissatisfaction with Zhang Dun's power. (Yang Xiaomin, 2012) The author of *The Cambridge History of the Song Dynasty of China (I)* also points out that the contradictions between Dun and his colleagues in the reform

school during the years of Yuanfu were not conflicts between parties, but rooted in “malice, jealousy and resentment,” and the focus of their confrontation was not political issues. In addition, there was a gradual process of internal relations between the reformers from the period of Shaosheng to the period of Yuanfu when they fell apart. (Cui Ruide & Shi Lemin, 2020) Wang Tianshun put forward that, in terms of personnel, Zhang Dun “advocated the criterion of real talent and practical learning”, while Zeng Bu “advocated the principle of scholars”; In attacking the members of the Yuanyou Party, Zhang Dun “held a firm and clear attitude”, while Zeng Bu “advocated focusing on scholars’ theory”. Moreover, the conflict between the two men was further complicated by the intervention of Emperor Zhezong, which was “a structural contradiction in the division of power between the two governments under the circumstance that the Song Dynasty strengthened the centralization of power”. (Wang Tianshun, 2009) Wang Ying pointed out that the “Gai-Jian case” which had been under cover for more than ten years suddenly appeared in the sensitive period during the alternation of Yuanyou and Shaosheng, which implied the Yuanyou Party members’ purpose of “attacking the reform school and overturning Zhang Dun and others”. (Wang Ying, 2017) Wu Shumin pointed out that behind Jian Xuchen’s diplomatic case reflected the power struggle between Zhang Dun and Zeng Bu and Cai Bian, and Emperor Zhezong took a more laissez-faire attitude to this. (Wu Shumin, 2019)

In recent years, scholars have also examined the party struggles between Zhang Dun and the late Northern Song Dynasty from the perspective of struggles in the palace. Wang Han pointed out that after the removal of Empress Meng and the replacement of Concubine Liu by Emperor Zhezong was closely related to the old struggles between conservatives and reform school at that time. Empress Meng, who was brought to power by Empress Dowager Gao, actually became the victim of the political struggles of Zhang Dun and others. (Wang Han, 1997) Xu Ling pointed out that Zhang Dun used the eunuchs Hao Sui, Liu Youduan and Liang Congzheng who were trusted by Emperor Zhezong as the sharps to attack the conservative forces represented by Empress Meng and help them implement the new deals. (Xu Ling, 2016) In this regard, Zhang Jin pointed out that “with a strong insight into

real politics”, Zhang Dun actively joined in the internal conflicts of the royal family, through promoting “Xuanren refutation” and helping Emperor Zhezong to abolish Empress Meng and appoint Concubine Liu, intended to “include the people around the emperor into his own circle”, in order to strengthen Zhang Dun’s political influence in the party struggle. (Zhang Jin, 2001) You Chanchan points out that, in order to maintain their own status, Empress Dowager Gao and Empress Dowager Xiang vividly attacked the reform school represented by Zhang Dun. These practices not only affected Zhang Dun’s personal political future, but also made the party struggle complicated and worsened. (You Chanchan, 2013)

(5) Studies on the Association Between Zhang Dun and Su Shi

The relationship between Zhang Dun and Su Shi has always been a more enthusiastic topic in the academic circle, especially the exploration of the process and reasons of their friendship to antagonism. As for the reasons of their enmity, the fierce party struggle and complicated political situation at that time were basically recognized by the academic circle. In addition, the differences in their personalities and people were also mentioned by many scholars, many of which praised Su Shi and denounced Zhang Dun. Zhu Feidi pointed out that compared with Zhang Dun’s dark and jealous inward, moody character, together with being cruel to political enemies, Su Shi seemed forthright, outspoken and pay attention to the emotion. (Zhu Feidi, 2013) Mo Lifeng also points out that Zhang Dun seemed selfish and jealous in political struggle, while Su Shi seemed tolerant and easy-going. (Mo Lifeng, 2008)

Different from the views above, Liu Zhaoming sorted out the relationship between Zhang Dun and Su Shi again by looking at their reciprocal poems, letters and anecdotes of legend. Mr Liu has published articles such as *An Examination on the Intercourse and Related Poems between Su Shi and Zhang Dun*, *An Examination on <Sending Su Zizhan> by Zhang Dun and <Out for Huzhou with Zhang Dun> by Su Shi*, *An Examination on the Quarrel and Hatred Between Su Shi and Zhang Dun*, as well as *A monograph Examination on the Relationship between Su Shi and Zhang Dun—With a Discussion on Related Poems and Historical Events*. Mr. Liu affirmed Zhang Dun’s “responsible, broad-minded, tolerance, respectable and discriminating between love and hate” character

and all aspects of the historical merit. The antagonistic relationship between Zhang and Su was related to Su Zhe's impeachment of Zhang Dun several times during Su Zhe's tenure as an imperial censor, but it was more due to Zhang Dun and Su Shi's different political positions. In addition, Mr. Liu denied the predecessors' opinion that Su Shi mocked Zhang Dun in his poems, and even in the balance of friendship, Su Shi suffered a loss to Zhang Dun. But Mr. Liu also did not accept the view put forward by some people in the Song Dynasty that Zhang's persecution of Su Shi was coerced by Cai Bian. Mr. Liu believed that Zhang Dun's resentment towards Su Shi was far greater than that of Cai Bian, and that he did not have to be coerced by Cai Bian to persecute Su Shi. As for the completely different evaluation of the two men by later generations, he believed that Zhang Dun had repeatedly relegated Su Shi to exile in retaliation for his political enemies, and thus had been criticized by later generations. On the contrary, Su Shi, who had experienced ups and downs, forgave Zhang Dun so graciously that he won praise from later generations. (Liu Zhaoming, 1998) Yu Shihua's idea is similar to Mr. Liu's, he believes that the process of Zhang Dun and Su Shi's changing from friends to enemies is affected by various factors, such as political inclination, personal feelings and the homogeneity of their personalities, so it cannot be explained only by demonizing Zhang Dun. The polarizing evaluation after the two men is also related to the later political orientation and the emotional tendency of the later generations. (Yu Shihua, 2011) Qi Chenyun thinks "No doubt Su Shi is judicious, but Zhang Dun may not be crafty and evil". (Qi Chenyun, 2011) Peng Wenliang pointed out that in terms of the Wu Tai Poem case, in the face of Zhang Dun's sincere exhort, Su Shi still had some embankments. (Peng Wenliang, 2016) Hu Zhen criticizes Zhang Dun for his narrowness and personal hatred of the public, while pointing out that Su Shi's criticism of Zhang Dun for opening up the frontier is too unkind, and that Su Shi did not help the banished Zhang Dun during the years of Yuanyou. (Hu Zhen, 2016)

(6) Studies on Zhang Dun's Attitude Towards the Succession of Emperor Huizong and His Demotion

Luo Jiaxiang and some other scholars pointed out that Zhang Dun and Wang Gui, who are listed as "traitor ministers" in the "Yuanyou

Traitor Party Tablet", are really neither fish nor fowl. Both Huizong and Cai Jing knew at that time that Zhang Dun and Wang Gui had nothing to do with the "Yuanyou camarilla", and only due to "not wanting to appoint Emperor Huizong" and the contradictions between them and the reform school, Zhang Dun was included in the camarilla. (Luo Jiaxiang, 2002) Pei Rucheng believed that the reviser of *History of the Song Dynasty* obviously agreed with Zhang Dun's practice of not advocating the establishment of Emperor Huizong, which contradicted the previous opinion that Zhang Dun was "a traitor minister", and could only conceal the contradiction in his argument by saying "incidents come". (Pei Rucheng, 2000) Gu Hongyi also pointed out that later official historical records about the accession of Emperor Huizong were affected by the cover-up and deletion by people on the spot, which was far from the historical reality at that time. The word "Prince Duan was too frivolous to be an acceptable choice as ruler." had experienced the process of "generally originated from the pens of people in the Yuan Dynasty, and then manifested in *History of the Song Dynasty-the Biography of Emperor Huizong*", then cited by Chen Jing's *Continuation of <History as a mirror>*, then copied into the *The Memoir of History of the Song Dynasty* and eventually became known as the "historic known by later generations". (Gu Hongyi, 2017) Huang Richu also analysed this word ("The Prince of Duan was too frivolous to be an acceptable choice as ruler"), he believes that this word did not exist in original historical data, but continuous modification, layer upon layer interpretation of historical imagination was integrated into later generations' account of the matter, "almost is a kind of layer-based contemporary history". This reconstruction of history reflects the historians' "evolution of historical figures from passive moral value judgment to active moral image construction". (Huang Richu, 2015) Yang Xiaomin holds a similar view. (Yang Xiaomin, 2012) Li Shuhao, citing Zeng Bu's record on the succession of Emperor Huizong, pointed out that Zhang Dun had a high say and "could even influence the transfer of the imperial throne". (Li Shuhao, 2017) Ding Jianjun and Han Yuhang proposed that Emperor Huizong achieved the goal of "removing the thorn in his side without making people feel that he was taking revenge on Zhang Dun" by making him serve as Emperor

Zhezong's chief mausoleum envoy and removing him by taking advantage of his negligence. Taking the cases of Zhang Dun, Ding Wei and Cai Que, the author reveals that in the relationship between emperors and ministers in Song Dynasty, the power of the prime minister largely depended on the protection of the imperial power, so that the change of the imperial throne had a decisive impact on the prime minister's future. (Ding Jianjun & Han Yuhang, 2021) Han Hong pointed out that Zhang Dun's criticism of Emperor Huizong's character on the succession of Emperor Huizong reflects the qualities of his courage, "heroic personality" and "speaking without conceit". But at the same time, it also exposed his shortcomings of "domineering and arrogant". (Han Hong, 2012)

(7) Studies on Zhang Dun's Later Evaluation and Historical Writing

As for the general situation of Zhang Dun's life, Huang Jinjun and Xiao Qingwei collected a variety of historical materials and narrated Zhang Dun's official career and life experience in a linear narrative way. (Huang Jinjun, 1999; Xiao Qingwei, 2014) Wang Tianshun made a relatively comprehensive study of Zhang Dun's official career. (Wang Tianshun, 2002) Wang Shanjun affirmed many qualities of the Zhang family, such as prosperous culture and education and upright style of work. (Wang Shanjun, 2019) Liu Zijian criticizes the dichotomy of moral character of gentleman and villain used in historical records as too simple. He believed that in addition to moral integrity, the evaluation of bureaucrats should pay attention to political ideas, academic status, administrative ability, political style and other factors. On this basis, he divided the bureaucrats in the late Northern Song Dynasty into virtuous governance, competent ability and power playing types, and Zhang Dun was between the "power playing type" and the "competent ability type". (Liu Zijian, 1987) Deng Guangming criticized the "absurd and melodic records" in the historical books represented by *History of the Song Dynasty*, and proposed that the historical facts about the reformist figures such as Zhang Dun should be clarified. (Deng Guangming, 2007) In recent years, scholars began to evaluate Zhang Dun objectively and fairly on the basis of re-analyzing historical materials and re-evaluating new deals in years of Xifeng. Yu Chaogang justified for Zhang Dun, arguing that his true temperament was heroic, although he

was "quite proud and sometimes viewed problems too fiercely", but his greatest advantage was that he dared to speak without considering his personal gains and losses, and that it was actually an ideological problem that Zhang Dun was listed as a traitor minister because of "his dictatorship in new deals of Shaoshu". (Yu Chaogang, 1997) Cui Wenbin gave a certain recognition to the conduct and politics of Zhang Dun, but also pointed out that it should not be excessively exalted. At the same time, the author points out that the later generations' evaluation of the reformists such as Zhang Dun was influenced by the cognition of new deals led by Wang Anshi. (Cui Wenbin, 2010) As for the research on the image construction of Zhang Dun by later generations, the academic circle explores the psychology and purpose of historians' writing under the influence of different times backgrounds by combing through the process of the construction of many historical texts. Pei Rucheng pointed out that in the revision of *History of the Song Dynasty*, due to the relatively one-sided writing principle of "worshiping, prizing moral life theory and devaluing utilitarian proposition", Zhang Dun was written into the Biography of Traitor Ministers. (Pei Rucheng, 2000) In addition, Pei Rucheng and Gu Hongyi pointed out that in the main historical source *The Long Complication of Continuing<History as a mirror>*: the old and new Records of Emperor Zhezong and Zeng Bu's diary, there are problems in writing and editing. In the process of writing *The Long Complication of Continuing< History as a mirror>* was also influenced by the trend of thought that denied the new deals of Wang Anshi in the Southern Song Dynasty. Besides, there were almost no written words handed down by Zhang Dun himself, so most of the contents of the dispute between Zeng and Zhang that we see today are Zeng Bu's one side of the story. (Pei Rucheng & Gu Hongyi, 2000) Yi Peixia also pointed out that Zeng Bu "tried every means to defame Zhang Dun without concealing anything" in his diary. (Yi Peixia, 2018) Li Jinchuang and Jiang Xiaolue pointed out that although *The Long Complication of Continuing< History as a mirror>* and *The Compilation of the Song Dynasty's Regulations* both fully included the records of Zhang Dun refuting Sima Guang's change from a conscript to a clerk, but the record of Zhang Dun in the existing *The Compilation of the Song Dynasty's Regulations* "appeared large sections of falling

off and repeating". (Li Jinchuang & Jiang Xiaolue, 2009) On the matter of Wang Anshi's knowledge of Zhang Dun, Chen Chaoyang pointed out that Shao Bowen's relevant records in his *Records by Shao Bowen* revealed the prejudice that "Wang Anshi has no knowledge of people, and Zhang Dun was a villain holding sway, which to a certain extent covered up the later generations' understanding and grasp of the image of Zhang Dun. (Chen Chaoyang, 2012) Zhang Yan pointed out that Wang Gong, who was close to the conservatives, vigorously criticized the "despicable personality" of Zhang Dun and other people and the behavior of persecuting the conservatives in his notes, and believed that the figures of reform school such as Zhang Dun were "treacherous players". Although they advocated reform, they were far from Wang Anshi's ideal of making the country rich and its military force efficient. (Zhang Yan, 2015) Citing Cai Hanmo's view, Wu Xiaodan argues that the Daoists of the Southern Song Dynasty, who controlled both official and private history writing, "crowded out the more objective narrative of <History as a mirror>" and "used history as a means to explain Taoism". Since most of the Southern Song Daoists were members of the conservatives, or descendants of the Northern Song Neo-Confucianists who supported the conservatives, Zhang Dun was inevitably identified as a wicked one. This was the basic position of most historical books such as *History of the Song Dynasty* in the late Southern Song Dynasty and thereafter. (Wu Xiaodan, 2017; Cai Hanmo, 2016) Chen Yu pointed out that under the influence of the complicated political situation at that time, there appeared some materials of different nature in the records of Zhang Dun in the *The Long Complication of Continuing< History as a mirror>*, especially Li Tao's notes, which reflected that "the official history seemed to deliberately avoid some details", and these materials often deliberately erased Zhang Dun's achievements and denigrate his reputation. Under such circumstances, Li Tao was still able to faithfully write and record Zhang Dun's achievements in a straightforward manner, which reduced the resistance of later scholars' studies on Zhang Dun. (Chen Yu, 2018)

(8) Studies on Emperor Zhezong's Appointment of Zhang Dun and the Relationship Between Emperor Zhezong and Zhang Dun

As for the reason why Emperor Zhezong chose the reform school represented by Zhang Dun,

some scholars point out that Emperor Zhezong was forced by reality. Zhang Jin believes that Emperor Zhezong was more determined to recall the reform school when he saw that there was no one in the old party of Yuanyou, including Fan Chunren, who could be used by him. Emperor Zhezong did not trust Zhang Dun as much as Zeng Bu or other members of the reform school, and he did not fully approve of Zhang Dun's style of conduct. (Zhang Jin, 2001) Fang Chengfeng pointed out that Emperor Zhezong had not formed his own mansion before he assumed the throne at a young age, and his early experience made him not very fond of the conservatives, so he had no choice but to choose the officials from the reform school left by Emperor Shenzong. (Fang Chengfeng, 2015) As for the power and influence that Zhang Dun actually held in Zhezong's dynasty, there are great differences among scholars. The author of *The Cambridge History of the Song Dynasty of China (Part I)* argues that Zhang Dun and the reform school had incomparable power in the Emperor Zhezong's dynasty, even to the extent that Emperor Zhezong was subject to their orders, and they were not supervised by him. (Cui Ruide & Shi Lemin, 2020) Wu Shumin pointed out that, in order to build and consolidate the group to implement the new deals, Emperor Zhezong is very dependent on the reform school headed by Zhang Dun, so Emperor Zhezong was lenient to the exclusive power of minister and the party struggle between ministers, which led to the crisis of weak emperor with strong minister in the last years of Shaosheng. Emperor Zhezong had tried to change this situation, but after all, he could not get rid of his dependence on Zhang Dun and others on big affairs. (Wu Shumin, 2019) Han Hong, on the other hand, believed that Emperor Zhezong trusted and relied on Zhang Dun very much from the very beginning, and in order to protect Zhang Dun's power, he did not set up the post of Shangshu Youcheng. And in order to protect his unique position, Zhang Dun also limited the office and number of other ministers. (Han Hong, 2012) Wang Tianshun pointed out that during the period of Shao Shu, Zeng Bu had the "rivaling" or even overriding trend on Zhang Dun in terms of power, and his great influence on military, political and diplomatic affairs was also greater than Zhang Dun's. (Wang Tianshun, 2009) Xu Ling put forward the same point of view. (Xu Ling, 2016)

The reason for this phenomenon, Wang Huayu pointed out, during the period of Shaoshu, compared with Zhang Dun's living in the Three Councils where several chancellors were serving at the same time, Zeng Bu was alone in the Privy Council in most of the time, making Zeng Bu "more advantageous in communicating with Emperor Zhezong". (Wang Huayu, 2019) Tian Zhiguang pointed out that Zeng Bu's personality characteristics of being smooth and mercurial and good at winning over people's heart was one of the reasons, but also had a great relationship with the "three provinces, the Privy Council on the hall of the service arrangement, more powerful for the Privy Council". It was because of this that Zhang Dun intervened in the military and political affairs of the Privy Council while restricting Zeng Bu's participation in the government affairs of the Three Councils, and even sometimes sent private letters to border generals and directly commanded them, thus gradually destroying "the operation mechanism of the Three Councils' taking decrees and signing documents together since the fourth year of Yuanyou". (Tian Zhiguang, 2011) Yang Xiaomin also put forward that, although Zhang Dun got the appointment of Emperor Zhezong by virtue of his frank and bold character, outstanding talent and adherence to the new deals, Emperor Zhezong didn't fully trust and had some dissatisfaction with him. Emperor Zhezong also took advantage of the contradictions between Zhang Dun and Zeng Bu and the Cai brothers to counterbalance Zhang Dun or utilized officials in Taijian system to supervise Zhang Dun. (Yang Xiaomin, 2012) Zhu Yiqun also pointed out that in the early years of Shaosheng, Zhang Dun's power was restricted in all aspects, and Emperor Zhezong's intentions of appointing minister and exercising governance were not very clear. But later, with the support of Emperor Zhezong, Zhang Dun held the power through his own strength, which had a gradual process. (Zhu Yiqun, 2017)

(9) Studies on Zhang Dun's Literary Achievements

The academic circle has discussed Zhang Dun's literary achievements from the aspects of artistic style, ideological significance and research value of his works. Chen Yuanfeng affirmed Zhang Dun as one of the "emerging literary newcomers in Jiayou's literary innovation trend of thought". A group of title paintings by Zhang Dun and others centered on Wang Wei's landscape

paintings provided a model for "exploring the complex spiritual world of the bachelor group in the reform school". (Chen Yuanfeng, 2013) Yuan Lujun highly recognized the literary achievements of Zhang Dun, and believed that although there were not many poems of Zhang Dun in the world, they were diversified in style and highly artistic. In terms of thought and emotion, "the subject spirit is always exalted in the poems of Zhang Dun", which also broadens the subject matter of the poems and the field of life reflected by them, and has rich practical significance. (Yuan Lujun, 2015) Hu Yue affirmed the literary and cultural attainments of the Zhang family. The author makes full use of materials such as poetry and prose, and points out that Zhang Dun is erudite and good at literature, works in calligraphy, and has heroic poetry style and pride. In addition, the author also explores his thoughts and their sources from his specific works, providing a model for the study of his thoughts. (Hu Yue, 2020)

3. A Brief Comment on the Existing Research Results

Throughout the domestic studies on Zhang Dun in the past 40 years, a certain scale of research group has been formed and relatively fruitful results have been achieved. To be specific, the research field is constantly expanding, and the research methods are constantly diversifying, especially in the excavation of historical materials and the application of interdisciplinary research methods has made important breakthroughs. Next, the author will elaborate from three aspects.

(1) The Research Content Is Expanded from Point to Aspect, Covering All Fields of the Study of Song History

As one of the more important issues in the study of the history of the Northern Song Dynasty, the development course of Zhang Dun's study is closely related to that of the study of the history of the Song Dynasty. Since the 1980s, the studies on the history of the Song Dynasty have gradually been paid attention to and achieved remarkable development, and the number of relevant research achievements has increased significantly. In the past 40 years, many monographs on Reform of Wang Anshi and the political and military history of the middle and late Northern Song Dynasty have carried out relevant research and discussion on Zhang Dun. At the same time, papers on or related to Zhang

Dun are also published frequently, and the fields covered by the research are constantly expanding. Specifically, the research on Zhang Dun has covered various branch fields, such as the political system and political culture in the late Northern Song Dynasty, opening up the frontier in the period of the two Emperors of Shenzong and Zhezong, the relationship between Emperor Zhezong and Zhang Dun, the party rivalry in the late Northern Song and Zhang Dun's literary attainments. The research has been gradually expanded and deepened from point to aspect.

(2) The Continuous Enrichment of Research Materials

In recent years, in addition to the study and evaluation of Zhang Dun through re-examination and interpretation of official historical materials such as *History of the Song Dynasty* and *The Long Compilation of Continuing <History as a Mirror>*, the academic circle also pays special attention to all kinds of notes and novels since the Song Dynasty, starting from diverse historical materials, and using the method of combining literature and history to explore later writers' historical writing and image shaping of Zhang Dun.

(3) The Development of Research Perspectives and Theoretical Innovation

In recent years, the academic circle has gradually reduced the characterisation and labeling evaluation in the study on new deals of Xifeng, the party struggle in the late Northern Song Dynasty and related characters, and made a new and more objective evaluation of the characters by showing their activities and mentality in the historical scene. Under this atmosphere, the image of Zhang Dun can be "straightened out" to a large extent. The study of Zhang Dun is no longer limited to the traditional field of political history, but more from the aspects of literature, culture, character and so on. In addition, the study of characters also pays more attention to "combine individual cases with the overall relevance of things", and through the characters and events to show the complex relationship between the background of the late Northern Song Dynasty, political trends, political changes and other elements. From the traditional class analysis method to the relationship between emperor and minister, information exchange and communication, auxiliary decision-making and operation, its

research methods and perspectives are constantly widening and refining.

4. The Prospect of Future Research

In the author's humble opinion, there is still room for development in the study of Zhang Dun. At present, the academic circle has not fully and systematically discussed all aspects of his thoughts, such as the view of the nation and the view of war. To this end, we should explore the origin and relationship between Zhang Dun's early experience and his own personality and psychology. Besides, his thoughts of opening up the frontier are not invariable, and their changes and development should be explored in combination with the specific background of the times. In addition, the inner court politics in the late Northern Song Dynasty can also be combined with the opening up the frontier to explore, such as the personnel strategy during the period when Zhang Dun presided over the military administration in the Northwest, the agreement and disagreement between the emperor and the minister and servants in the process of opening up the frontier in the northwest, the relationship between Emperor Zhezong and Zhang Dun and the mutual influence of opening up the frontier in the northwest, the interaction between the grand strategy of the emperor and the minister and the lower military strategy and other issues.

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