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The Afterlife of Su Shi  
Under Jurchen Rule:  
The Making of a Literati Model  
In Middle Period North China



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As a transnational iconic poet across East Asia since the Middle Period, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) set up a role model for literati culture. This presentation deals with his many lives in the Jurchen Jin period (1115–1234), a conquest dynasty ruled by an ethnic minority called Jurchen people. I first argue for the political rehabilitation of Su Shi advocated by Jurchen rulers in service of their legitimacy for Song-Jin dynastic transfer. Then I turn to his cultural legacy that took root on the northern Jin soil. It is said that “the learning of Su [Shi] prevailed in the North” among Jin literati community. The transmission of Su Shi’s writing was achieved not only through printing and anthologization, but also via emulation and commemoration. At last, two examples of Jin literati art are given to showcase how Su’s admirers were transformed into his reincarnations or avatars. The burgeoning Jin literati culture modeled on Su Shi not only reaffirms the immortality of this cultural hero, but this long-forgotten story under Jurchen rule also urges us to revisit and complicate the overall literary landscape of Middle Period China.

Lili Xia is a PhD candidate in the Department of East Asian Studies at Princeton University. Titled “Claiming China Against North-South Divide: Classical Traditions and Literati Culture in the Jurchen Jin Dynasty (1115–1234),” her dissertation deals with Jin literature and art in North China as rival narratives of the mainstream Southern Song literary history. Her research further reveals the constructedness of China as an intersubjective, transcultural, and border-crossing space in the Middle Period (900–1300). During her PhD study, she has produced several peer-reviewed journal articles in English and Chinese on Northern Song literati culture, and she is now working on a collaborative Digital Humanities project called “Social Network Analysis of Middle Period Literati in North China.” Her broader research interests include cultural memory projected in Chinese literature, issues of antiquarianism, classicism and canonization, transmediality between poetry and painting, as well as book history and material culture.

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