

## Abstract

The practice of ennoblement became an important institution of the imperial government quite early, yet it were only the Western Jin who managed to combine various traditions of the previous regimes and transform them into a full-fledged system of titled nobility which was to be used by all subsequent dynasties of Mediaeval China. The development process did not end with the foundation of the dynasty and underwent many changes even during the reign of the Jin having been constantly improved or modified according to current political needs. The present study, based on close reading of the Jinshu standard history and selected chapters of Sanguozhi, focuses on the nature of the Jin ennoblement system and its changing use in the politics of the dynasty. The ennoblement system of the Western Jin was quite flexible being used in order to achieve highly diverse aims from rewarding loyal service to asserting legitimacy as the sole inheritor of the imperial tradition or strengthening diplomatic alliance with semi-independent tribal rulers. Thus, the Western Jin titled nobility was a group of families of fairly varied origins. The pride of place belonged to meritorious ministers, but there were also imperial in-laws, former Wei courtiers as well as descendents of illustrious Han families, scions of deposed royal houses and royal pretenders of rival regime who had defected to the Jin. With loosening of the original restrictions on further ennoblement during the second half of the dynasty the titled nobility expanded considerably comprising also military commanders and men of local influence who had risen in service of various princes of the blood together with rulers of nomadic tribes inhabiting the border regions of the empire.